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Africa and the Caribbean in Caribbean consciousness and action in Britain

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Introduction

Of the various groups which saw themselves as being essentially political in purpose, perhaps none was more consistently so than the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUF). With its radical agenda for change, it eschewed what it saw as cultural nationalist postures, but at the same time drew upon Caribbean and African heroes, icons and radical ideas, and therefore played a major part in the development of Caribbean consciousness of a wider Caribbean as well as renewed the historic breach with Africa.

This chapter analyses three aspects of the group's history. These are, first, the origins of the group; second, its beliefs or ideology; and third, the kinds of activities with which the group was involved in the emerging Caribbean communities of the 1970s. The account here draws on the group's publications, including minutes, memoranda, leaflets and its newspaper, Black Voice, coverage in the local press, and personal observations. While subsequent developments are not neglected, the emphasis here is on the early history of the

group in the 1970s, when, not unlike other similar groups, BUFP was most active and relevant to the general articulation of radical politics in these new communities.

Origins, continuity and structure

On Saturday 27 July 1991 the BUFP celebrated its twenty-first anniversary with an afternoon programme around the theme of 'self-defence and community organisation'. Held at the premises of the Simba Project at 239 Uxbridge Road in West London, the programme included an address by founding member Danny Morrell who spoke on 'The first year - 1970' followed by open discussion. There were two sessions of poetry readings by young writers, messages of solidarity from other groups in Britain and abroad, and open discussion sessions. During the course of the afternoon there were long presentations by BUFP spokespersons on 'From Aseta Simms to Rolan Adams (1970-1991)¹, and 'Self-defence and community organisation - the struggle for liberation today'. Crèche for babies and small children were provided; a 'collection' was made, a donation of a £1 requested and a small charge made for some food items - all in order to help with the costs of the day. Book selling, the playing of music, the exchange of a variety of information, 'reasoning', and

¹. The case of Rolan Adams is returned to later in this discussion. Aseta Simms died in Stoke Newington police station during the night of 13 May, 1971. It appears that she was taken in off the street at about 11.30 pm and died sometime between 12.00 and 12.30 am. A doctor, apparently representing the police commission, who examined the body was reported to say that he could not '... say what was the cause of her death' [BUFP pamphlet, 1972, p.3]. The verdict was death by misadventure. The North London branch of the party led a campaign, involving publications, demonstrations, meetings, etc., to demand a public enquiry into the circumstances of Mrs Simms' death [see, *Black Voice*, 1972 *passim*].

good cheer and humour punctuated the day. The event was billed for the afternoon, and everything went on in a well organised, orderly manner, with the programme being kept within schedule. At no point did it appear that there might be police interference, as would have been the case in the 1970s, when one or more comrades would be tasked to keep an eye open for either agents provocateurs and/or the raiding police. Participants appeared to be perfectly at ease with themselves and their surroundings and many appeared to be conscious of the fact that the BUFP had played an important role in the development of black consciousness in the UK.

Indeed, there was something here of a happy family affair. True enough, Comrade Danny, Comrade Jerry and myself were present, but missing were most of the original founding members of the BUFP, and a different membership had command of affairs. George Joseph, the premier figure in the founding of the group, had returned to Trinidad in 1973, worked as a civil servant and came to an untimely death in the mid 1980s. His widow, Sonia Chang (from Jamaica) had accompanied him to Trinidad, but returned first to Jamaica and then to London with their son Che (named after Ernesto Che Guevara, the Argentinean turn Cuban revolutionary). Busy working in London with the Hackney West Indian Neighbourhood Association and caring for her son, Sonia was also absent at the BUFP meeting on the 27 July. Also absent were Emil Chang (a cousin of Sonia's), who had come to Britain to play cricket in the 1940s, returned to Jamaica in the 1970s and then returned to live in North East London (where he died in the mid 1990s) There was a noticeable absence of the kinds of young,

critical, intellectuals who would have been present in the early years.

Typical of this last group was Alrick (Ricky) Xavier Cambridge, undoubtedly the second moving spirit behind the formation of the group in Summer 1970; he was also absent at the twenty-first anniversary celebrations. He and the BUFP had parted company in late 1971. A dynamic and creative personality, Ricky had gone on to found the Black Liberator journal which sought to pull together a number of themes about revolution and change in the Caribbean and in Britain. Indeed, for the few years of its existence the Black Liberator became the leading black and Caribbean journal in Britain, but apart from Hall *et al* (1978), the work of this publication has attracted no attention in the academic literature. With the demise of the journal Cambridge went on to realise a long ambition of completing a degree. In a well-established middle class West Indian tradition he went to Oxford, where he later registered for a doctorate in philosophy, working on the Trinidadian historian and intellectual, CLR James, and publishing on issues such as identity and belongingness.

George Joseph on the other hand, of a less intellectual bent than Cambridge but with perhaps a more practical mind, had studied sociology at university and held an MA. The first years of the BUFP was very much a credit to him, moving between South East and North East London and Manchester (Moss Side and Oldham) in the North West of England. He exuded quiet confidence and optimism among both the majority younger, as well as the older, members of the group. Of the generation of middle class West Indians who came to Britain

primarily to study, he was one of the first of the relatively few who established a meaningful and practical relationship with working class West Indian immigrants and their offspring. The fact that he ended teaching/training the Trinidad police is part of the irony of class, race and the migration process. The story for a number of the group's members was to be similar, that is to say, some would end up in professional (medicine, law, academic work, etc.) or semi-professional (teaching, social and youth work, etc.) occupations in Britain or elsewhere.

The family atmosphere of the twenty-first celebrations was also reflected in the sense of forgiveness, the irrelevance of past differences and quarrels. Danny Morrell, for example, had for a while been regarded as 'Daft Danny', due to his enthusiasm over some now forgotten matters. Two decades on and he proved to be one of the most faithful and consistent of the group of 1970-71, and he clearly appreciated the respect the younger people were paying him. Comrade Jerry had gone on to establish a happy family, with children doing well at school and one about to go to university (the bourgeois institution he would have condemned in the early 1970s). He looked as young as he did in 1971, but he was now a great deal more tolerant and appeared a wiser man.

In many respects, the agenda in 1991 was not very different from what it would have been in the early 1970s. There would have been much the same mix of social provision and care, entertainment and general social mixing reminiscent of the church, the family and the social club in Caribbean communities in Britain.

Political discussion, however, formed the central concern of the day. Earlier there would have been a stronger emphasis on constitutionality, and procedures would have been more formal; dogmatism and certainty, verbal intolerance and adherence to purity of doctrine, with frequent references to Marx and Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Fanon would have been stronger, or at least less subtle in 1970 than in 1991.

But perhaps the noticeable difference between the founding members of the BUFP in 1970 and those who met to celebrate its twenty-first anniversary in 1991 was the gender dimension of the leadership. In 1970 all the leading speakers were men, with women aplenty playing supportive but less prominent roles. On 27 July 1991 the main players were women. Now, a number of men played supporting roles, and thereby reflected one of the major social shifts in Caribbean communities in the UK, that is, the greater prominence of women in the public sphere.

Thus, whilst the invitation to the occasion went under the signature of a male, Kimathi (name of a Kenyan Mau Mau leader who fought against settler colonialism), the chairperson for the day was Julietta Joseph (no relation to George), and women dominated the occasion. It was as if the men had come to recognise or accept their broader subordinate role to the women (where active participation and responsibilities are concerned), but there was no sign of resentment, disrespect or competition. The situation seemed natural enough to all present. Nor was there any reference to gender issues in order to justify the

situation. The group had obviously either achieved something important here or was reflecting the sad state in the community whereby the absence of men or their less than active leadership roles are becoming more pronounced.

In terms of age distribution, the membership of the group appeared to be much the same as in 1970. In general, the BUFP had been an organisation of young people in their late teens or early adulthood to their thirties. The re-migration of many of its members in the 1970s, and the moving on of some to other concerns, had helped to keep the age profile of the group more or less constant. Spawned by the protest of youths in the 1970s, the BUFP in the 1990s sought to renew its original inspiration; it appeared as if one generation was passing on responsibility for the organisation to the next. This youthful profile did not conform to the general description of most groups where there is usually the tendency for the membership either to remain constant or decline, and the membership ageing with the organisation. This is certainly a major problem for what may still be the main Caribbean umbrella organisation in the country, the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) which has been both a broker and a protest group from its inception in 1957 following the Nottinghill white riots (Goulbourne, 1990).

The constantly renewing membership of the BUFP did, however, have its weakness. If older members were inaccessible, then the accumulation of useful experience could disappear all too rapidly, and younger people were then forced to start afresh the process of learning. The continued existence of the BUFP

beyond the early 1990s was therefore in question. One mitigating factor was the prospect of their being more elder Caribbean folks spending their retirement years in Britain instead of returning to the Caribbean or re-migrating to North America. Another mitigating factor was the fact that the organisation had relatively clear ideas about its work, it kept records, published, and members were deeply committed to what they saw as their work. The group was also rooted within local communities. The ups and downs of state and other forms of public funding did not affect the group, because it did not depend on such resources, but on its own membership.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the publications announcing the group's activities in 1991 would appear familiar to any one from a meeting in 1970. One poster called upon supporters to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the emergence of Toussant L'Ouverture, the Haitian liberator, who led the only successful slave rebellion in history; the Haitian Revolution was being interpreted as 'black history for action' in the 1990s. Another leaflet called for support of the family while others protested against the racist killing of Rolan Adams on Thursday 21 February 1991 in Thamesmead, and was to trigger a London-wide protest with the famous Rev Al Sharpton of New York participating at one point, and thereby continued to make links between black struggles and concerns across the Atlantic. The group called for support at the Old Bailey on 7 October 1991, when the case would be heard, and at the British National Party headquarters in Welling (East London) on 2 November 1991. Not surprisingly, another pamphlet was concerned with the 'black community

against women's oppression'. There was information about developments in the Asian communities in Britain, events in the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere. The group reaffirmed its basic principles, which were first set out in 1970, and although modified over the years, remained consistent.

It may be useful, therefore, to consider the circumstances which brought the group about; circumstances which would have, to one degree or another, most likely informed the formation of similar groups in and around London and a number of large cities in Britain such as Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester and Southampton. London was, however, the centre of these activities not only by virtue of being the nation's capital, but more importantly because the vast majority of people from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1962 settled in one or the other of the inner boroughs such as Lambeth, Haringey and Southwark.

Three closely related sets of developments may be said to contribute to, and set the context for, the emergence of the BUFP and similar groups such as the Croydon Collective, the Black Liberation Front, the Black Panther Movement, and the South East London Black People's Organisation, which sprung up throughout the city in the early 1970s.

Perhaps the first development which formed the backdrop for the emergence of these community-based groups was the break up of the Universal Coloured Peoples' Alliance (UCPA). This had been formed by the Nigerian playwright

Ebi Egbuna in 1967 (Egbuna, 1971), and some leading lights included the Guyanese Ron Phillips who later played a major role in community politics in Manchester² and Roy Sawh, later of Black Rights UK. As the UCPA explained in one of its leaflets in 1970, the word 'coloured' was widely accepted at the time, and the name also reflected that of Marcus Mosiah Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Organisation of the 1920s (see, Lewis & Warner, 1986; Lewis & Bryan, 1988). The formation of the UCPA followed the dramatic visit of Kwame Toure³ (at the time, Stokeley Carmichael) to London and his talk at the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm. Just as the earlier visit by Martin Luther King - during his return from Stockholm on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize - in 1964 had stimulated the founding of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), so Kwame Toure's visit stimulated the birth of a new body. CARD had been an umbrella organisation, bringing together existing Asian groups - such as the Federation of Pakistani Organisations, the Indian Workers Association and Caribbean groups such as WISC themselves umbrella bodies - under its aegis. CARD sought to influence government to legislate against racial discrimination in housing, employment and public places such as clubs and restaurants, much as civil rights groups in the USA had done, resulting in Lyndon Johnson's momentous 1963 Civil Rights Act (see, Heinemann, 1971)

It would appear that just as CARD broke up into its previous constituent parts

² . Ron Phillips was the eldest of three well known brothers, the others being the crime writer Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, chair of the London Assembly; Ron later re-migrated to the USA, and died in the mid 1990s in Philadelphia.

³ . The names Kwame Toure were taken from Carmichael's two heroes Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure of Ghana and Guinea respectively. Kwame Toure died of cancer in the late 1990s, after living for decades in Guinea, West Africa, and gaining recognition throughout the African Diaspora, including his native Trinidad.

and in the process stimulated the birth to new groups - such as the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)⁴ and the Runnymede Trust and the UCPA itself - so too the collapse of the UCPA spawned new groups in black communities in England's inner cities. With respect to Caribbean groups, the two main organisations which emerged during these years were the Black Panther Movement (BPM) and the BUFP⁵. The BPM was initially led by David Uдах, a Church of England clergyman, who later went on to play an important role in opening the established church to issues of colour and inequality in the Diocese of Southwark. Another leader was Darcus Howe, a nephew of the late CLR James and a then collaborator with John LaRose of New Beacons Publishers. Howe later went on to lead the Race Today Collective with Leila Hussain (originally from Zanzibar and a former member of the BUFP) and the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, who became, and has remained, a symbol of the fusion of black poetry and music movement in Britain. Later still, Howe became a programme producer and journalist with the television Channel4 network, working closely with the former student radical, the Trotskyist Tariq Ali, and Channel4's programme commissioner, Farouk Dhondi, who was himself a former member of the BPM. Others included Eddie Leconte, Althea Jones (later Leconte) who was at the centre of the famous Mangrove Nine trials in 1970-71 in Nottinghill⁶.

⁴. The JCWI itself suffered a similar fate in the early 1990s, when its Birmingham branch separated to form an independent body from its London headquarters.

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. In John LaRose's view Althea Jones (as she then was) personified black British youth protest in the 1970s. Born and brought up in a Trinidadian middle class family, she came to England to study, and at the time of the Mangrove Nine trial Althea Jones was conducting research for a doctorate in chemistry at London University. She later became a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, where she also studied medicine, before returning to the UK,

The BUFP founders claimed that they were the legitimate inheritors of the UCPA. Indeed, the build up to the formation of the BUFP occurred under the umbrella of the UCPA, and the pre-launch documents as well as early BUFP letters, were written on UCPA-headed paper, and UCPA addresses in London and Manchester were taken over by the BUFP. One of the earliest BUFP paper-heads reads, 'Black Unity and Freedom Party (Formerly the UCPA)', and two addresses are given as 45 Fairmount Road, London SW2, and 22 Monton Street, Moss Side, Manchester 14. One of the major documents prepared for the launch of the BUFP with 'confidential' written at the top and the bottom of the front page reads, 'UCPA for members only, draft reorganisation document'. This document, almost certainly written by Cambridge and Joseph, sets out the group's reasons for the need of a new organisation which would pursue both short and long term goals in the interest of the 'masses', or 'black humanity'; it hailed 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought' as the relevant ideology which would guide the new organisation, whilst practical examples would be drawn from the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. But it proclaimed that the 'best example today' of how to avoid slipping into a totally reformist ideology and programme was declared to be '... the breakfast programme being carried out by the Black Panther Party, while at the same time revolution is on the agenda' (UCPA, p.4, nd., but presumably 1970).

The founders of the BUFP, principally led by George Joseph and Alrick Cambridge, saw the BPM and themselves to be divided along fundamental

apparently as a general practitioner.

ideological lines. In brief, these lines of difference involved their understanding of the notion or concept of Black Power and the place of the class struggle in the fight for equality in Britain and elsewhere. It would appear that the BPM placed the emphasis on cultural awareness and the unity of all blacks, and were therefore regarded - using the American term popular at the time - as 'cultural nationalists'. This meant that African history, culture, dress, hairstyle and so forth were of predominant importance to them. So too were events in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Third World. These were also important for the BUFP. But as will be noted, the BUFP tended to place the class struggle at the forefront of their concerns, and cultural matters as relatively less important. Indeed, for the BUFP events in Britain, the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere were properly to be understood in class terms. The group condemned the black bourgeoisie as 'Uncle Toms'⁷ as vehemently as it condemned capitalism and imperialism. The BUFP also sought more actively to work with white radical groups than most black groups did, not because they were white but because these groups shared or had similar ideological orientations as the group, that is to say, they placed the emphasis on class, not colour/race or gender. The ideological hegemony of feminism and cultural studies as well as the demise of collective politics in the 1980s and 1990s were to vindicate the position taken by the BPM and marginalised the BUFP's more uncompromising political position⁸.

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. The term came from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom published at the height of the anti-slavery movement in the Northern states of the US in the 1850s. The relevance of the epithet is discussed in the next chapter.

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. Internally, the BUFP sought to establish a women's group and a youth group. Discussions around the kinds of problems youth and women faced were promoted, but in practice the membership tended to act in unison over the general problems the organisation addressed. The group arranged discussion groups around Marxist philosophy, black history, developments in Africa, Asia, the Americas and so forth. It arranged for visitors to the country to address groups in specific communities, and members met on a regular basis to monitor events in their

Yet, in several ways the BUFP and the BPM were not so very different from each other as their members thought. Their differences might have been as much about personality as about ideology, although both groups would have denied this. They were physically located close to each other in Peckham, New Cross and Brixton areas in South London, and again in North London in Hackney, Kings Cross and the Angel. To a degree they both drew upon local communities for their memberships. For example, Linton Kwesi Johnson was a pupil at Tulse Hill Comprehensive School a mile or so from Shakespeare Road in Brixton where the BPM had its South London headquarters. Probably half of the BUFP membership in Peckham, New Cross (such as Garfield James, Philip Murphy⁹, Joan and Roger Lofters¹⁰ and several others) had been at comprehensive schools in the area such as the then Peckham Manor, Peckham Girls', Dick Shepherd's and so forth. Members of the groups knew each other, and shared similar experiences. George Joseph, Althea Jones, and a number of the BPM members were from Trinidad and had come to England to attend university. Memberships were, however, spread across the continents for both groups, because black (a crucial criterion for membership in both groups) was understood to mean any person who hailed from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean and South America; black or blackness, pointed as much to a person's experience as to his or her

neighbourhoods.

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. Philip Murphy, who read philosophy at the University of Southampton, went on to become a prominent Labour councillor on Birmingham City Council, and an officer at the Commission for Racial Equality in the city.

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. Roger Lofters, who had returned to Jamaica in the late 1970s and became the electrician manager at the University of the West Indies' Hospital in Kingston, came to an untimely death in an accident in summer 1997. A gathering in his honour was later held in Brixton, organised by young members of the then BUFP and a number of old members from different parts of the country attended.

pigmentation. The largest membership was in both cases African-Caribbean, because these were primarily Caribbean groups responding to and also shaping the radical challenge of young black people to their status in English society.

The second factor which influenced the formation of the BUFP, the BPM, and other groups was the coming of age of a relatively small number of individuals who were neither part of what are usually called the 'first' nor the 'second' generations of immigrants by migration scholars. Typically, the leaders of these groups, such as Joseph, Cambridge, Howe, Leconte and others were individuals born and brought up in the Caribbean. Some, like Howe, had had direct experience of political life before coming to Britain, and were close to individuals such as CLR James and John LaRose who, between them, had considerable Caribbean, North and Latin American experiences. Most members, however, were individuals born in the Caribbean but almost entirely brought up in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some had graduated from colleges and universities, others had just left school and were entering the world of work. Here was a mix of factors which spawned a radical questioning of the socio-economic structures of a Britain which was barely beginning to adjust to her post-imperial position in the world.

The memberships of these groups represented, therefore, a creative cross fertilising of youthful aspirations, and these young people were able to draw upon a British as well as wider international experience. Perhaps for the first time a dynamic link was being forged between immigrant communities and

those who had come to Britain primarily to study. In these years, Caribbean communities in Britain lacked a recognisable elite; middle class migration had been relatively small, and in any event the relatively few who had come from that class did not necessarily share the experiences of the majority of black workers and their offspring. The progressive Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) - documented by Anne Warmesley (1992), one of its English participants - was the major outlet for the Caribbean intellectual elite in Britain but was coming to an end in 1970. This was just at the point when new groups, new voices representing different experiences, were about to begin to articulate new demands and new issues bred largely of the immigrant workers' experience as well as the exclusionary experiences of their disaffected children in the school system and the employment market. CAM was not, however, an elite with particularly strong connections with the immigrant communities; it was a Caribbean elite of young scholars and artists temporarily away from the Caribbean - or in 'exile' as some were wont to say¹¹. Their production was important in portraying and structuring the Caribbean across the Atlantic, but the vast majority of its members returned to the region rather than became intellectuals in Britain.

This was a time for the coming of age of a neglected group in the migration process - those who had accompanied immigrant parents to Britain and were not prepared to face the prospects of replacing their parents in lowly, marginal,

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. Nearly all these individuals (for example, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Orlando Patterson) were to go on to distinguished careers in the Caribbean and North America, and relatively few (such as John LaRose) remaining in England to make a lasting mark in Caribbean communities, as is outlined in a later chapter.

jobs. It was the loss of innocence about the nature of British society on the part of older folks who had been schooled in the Caribbean about fair play and equality in 'the mother country' (see, for example, Carter, 1986). The new assertion also marked the decline of groups such as WISC, which had carried the banner for Caribbean protest in Britain since 1957.

The third aspect of the period which provided the general context for the emergence of radical and black Caribbean groups was, of course, the prevailing social and political situation of the years 1968-71. Enoch Powell, MP for Wolverhampton and member of the Conservative shadow cabinet, had given his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech in Birmingham in 1968 at a time when American cities were in flames as black America protested on the streets about their centuries old repressed and marginalised conditions. These scenes were on television for everyone to see. Also, in Summer 1970 the Tories under Edward Heath unexpectedly won the general elections, and although Powell had been sacked from the shadow cabinet in 1968, his influence in the country and indeed within the Conservative party was paradoxically on the increase, not the decline (Goulbourne, 1991).

Moreover, the new government soon made clear where it stood on domestic and international issues pertaining to Africa and Britain's new black minorities. The foreign secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home the former prime minister who had been with Halifax to appease Hitler in the late 1930s, visited South Africa and agreed for Britain to sell arms to the apartheid regime at a time when all South

Africa's neighbours were prosecuting wars of liberation against Salazar's Portugal and South Africa itself. Nothing significant would be done about the illegal white minority regime of Ian Smith in the then colony of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Not that Labour, in office when UDI was declared in 1964/5, had demonstrated any greater willingness to bring the regime to heel. Indeed, whilst Harold Wilson's government had been quick to dispatch Metropolitan police officers to the tiny islet of Anguilla to squash Webster's attempt at self-government, Smith was made to understand that the British would not use troops against kith and kin in the colony of Rhodesia.

To Britain's black population these clear signals of support for whites at home and abroad seemed to fit perfectly into a more general pattern of international affairs. From North America to the Caribbean to Southern Africa (including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia), using NATO, multi-national corporations, and police forces, white power appeared to be mobilised against the very existence of black populations in Africa and the Diaspora.

Discussions in Britain over control of immigrants soon led to the Immigration Bill which in 1971 became an Act virtually barring black immigration into Britain by resurrecting from Reconstruction America the 'grandfather clause' as the 'patrial clause'. Individuals with no personal connections with the country but whose grandfathers had been born in Britain could gain entry, but individuals with origins outside Britain currently living in the UK would be restricted in their rights to invite members of their families to join them. Coupled with the

policy of repatriation which Powell and the Tory right-wing Monday Club were trying to get their party to adopt, these measures amounted to a very nasty signal from the government to people from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean that they were unwelcome in Britain. Moreover, these were years when the US under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger was making a desperate attempt to defeat by any means necessary the Vietnamese people, and expected Britain's political support. In Britain, the anti-Vietnam war movement was petering out after the dramatic demonstrations outside the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square in 1969, and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign appeared to be at a loss over what should be done to assist the peoples of East Asia in their struggles against imperialism.

Of these developments none seemed more relevant to a settling British black population than those in Black America. The slogan of Black Power, the news about the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California founded and led by Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton, ex-prisoner and celebrated essayist Eldridge Cleaver and others, the militancy and fluency of Stokeley Carmichael, the flamboyance of H Rap Brown, the bravery of Angela Davis, the courage of the Soledad Brothers¹² and a number of similar developments throughout the USA (in politics, the arts, sports, etc.) fired the imagination of radicals throughout Britain's new minority ethnic communities. The Americans' books and popular publications, particularly the Black Panthers Speak, were avidly read. The fact that the youth of Caribbean backgrounds shared a common history of slavery and

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. These were George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, whose experience in prison politicized them, and made them heroes of radical black America and Britain.

a diasporic African culture with Black America meant that their activities would be more immediately received by this section of the new communities in Britain. Moreover, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before Idi Amin's expulsion of British Asians from Uganda black youths with a Caribbean background constituted the majority of young people in the ethnic minority communities. It is a mistake, however, to assume as it has become fashionable to do since the mid 1980s (see, Modood, 1988), that the black explosion in America did not affect people in the British Asian communities; it did (see, Sivanandan, 1993). And it was also to have a major impact on most areas of community life in Britain for the next two decades, thereby forming - for better or for worse - part of the link between British and American race relations issues and perspectives (see, Hiro, 1971).

The militant radicalism of the American Black Panthers was also to influence the formal structure of the BUFP. The Panthers had deliberately set themselves up as an organisation mirroring the governmental structure of a state, even though they did not formally demand territorial separation and the establishment of a black state in North America. There was a prime minister (Stokeley Carmichael), a minister of information (Eldridge Cleaver), a minister of defence (Huey Newton), and as in Mao's China, a chairman (Bobby Seale), and a chief of staff. These titles demonstrated the group's seriousness and the main problems they faced. The BUFP did not seek to import wholesale this structure to the British context, but the general tone could be felt within the organisation as reflected in the emphases the group gave to the functions these 'ministers' would be

expected to perform in the USA. Information and propaganda were important, but of greater significance was the role of the general secretary.

Now, the influence here came from an entirely different source - Leninism. The BUFP's proclaimed adherence to Marxism-Leninism meant that many of the titles used by the American Panthers had to be subordinated to those of the Leninist theory of organisation. This not only involved having a general secretary of the party, but also a commitment to what Lenin called democratic-centralism, the fusing of the dual or contradictory principles of democracy and central control. In practice, central control has proven to be the stronger principle in Leninist organisations, as Rosa Luxembourgh had foreseen in the states where such parties came to achieve control of power - the former state socialist systems of East Europe and the former USSR. Expectedly, in the BUFP Joseph and his successor general secretaries never came to exercise the power or control expected of a Marxist-Leninist group. For several years discussion took place over the appointment of a full-time national organiser, but this was never achieved. Instead, the work of the organisation was conducted by members themselves, with their own internal resources. Unlike the BPM the BUFP never came to own their own premises, but used rented accommodation. This meant that the group did not go through lengthy disputes over ownership of property when some members left the organisation, due to differences, or re-migration or return to the Caribbean. However, again, this difference between the groups was to be reflected in later developments, with the BPM being vindicated, and the more idealistic orientated BUFP which eschewed private ownership of property

has proven to be mistaken.

There would be several reasons for this, such as the fact that the BUFP had never been the clandestine, underground organisation Lenin had in mind; nor was it really a political party as its name would suggest - it never contested elected seats either at national or local levels of the state. The principal reasons for the failure or irrelevance of the Leninist principle, however, are that membership (entry and exit) had been voluntary, and the socio-political culture of members was deeply rooted in the liberal individualism that characteristic of the social and political ideologies and values of the Commonwealth Caribbean. As I have suggested elsewhere (Goulbourne, 1991; 1999) and have implied in the discussion so far, this is one of the most important underlying principles within the value system of English-speaking Caribbeans; and it is in sharp contradiction with the extreme collectivism the Leninist principle takes for granted.

Aims, objectives and ideology

What then were the aims and objectives of the BUFP in 1970, which were still considered to be relevant in the significantly different early years of the 1990s. These were clearly set out in the group's manifesto dated 26 July, 1970 (the precise date of the BUFP's founding¹³) repeated in one form or another in the

¹³

. This date was deliberately chosen to reflect the importance of the Cuban Revolution for Caribbean people living in Britain and elsewhere.

group's newspaper, Black Voice, and in various documents. The manifesto is divided into two parts.

The first is a general statement of BUFP's ideological predisposition. It proffers a radical prognosis of British society, and the international context of imperialism and capitalism, and in 1970 its central principles were set out in six points(seven in later years). The differences between the original and the revised later statements are perhaps more significant in this part of the manifesto than in the second part about demands. There is a shift here in ideological tone away from the Maoism of the early years. These principles also set out more forcefully the aims and objectives of the group. It is interesting that the first principle stated by the 1970 document is that it recognised 'the class nature' of British society; the second point was the recognition of the usual Marxist consequence of class and class struggle, resulting in the Leninist commitment to 'the seizure of state power by the working class and the bringing about of socialism'. The later document commences with the 'aim to build a unified and principled organisation capable of serving the needs of Black people'; the statement about socialism and class struggle comes second. Both documents are clear about the class nature of British society, the need to unite against capitalism and imperialism, and bringing an end to the exploitation of 'man by man' (changed to 'people by people' in the later version). In 1970, however, the group's leaders drew heavily upon Mao's essay 'On contradiction' in stating these points. The contradiction, following Mao, between the working class and the capitalists is fundamental (of 'primary importance' in the later version), whilst

the contradiction between the white and black working classes is a contradiction among the people (and therefore presumably, in Mao's terms, non-antagonistic). The later statement does not employ Mao Tse Tung Thought¹⁴.

On the other hand, racism continued to be seen as a major factor in the lives of Britain's black population. Additionally, in line with the changing times, the manifesto firmly addresses the need to overcome misconceptions among 'oppressed peoples of different cultures', and promoting good understanding among them. Clearly, the multi-culturalist theme had worked its way into the group's thinking about British society, because the major ideology embraced by both left and right along the political spectrum had become multi-culturalism, as noted in chapter two. Even so, the later statement, like that of 1970, ended with a commitment to the 'complete overthrow of capitalism/imperialism', bringing to an end exploitation, and forging unity with all who share common goals against inequality and are committed to equality and social justice for all.

The second part of the manifesto is a list of immediate demands patterned on the platform of the US Black Panther Party. This part of the manifesto later came to be called the group's 'short term demands', and later still they were condensed from eleven to nine points. The demands were modified, in most cases, to meet British conditions. The first of these remained over the years an end to police brutality against black people, and a call for a public enquiry into the activities of

¹⁴. This was so no doubt because the death of Mao in September 1976 and the subsequent struggle in China for control of state power revealed some of the injustices of the Cultural Revolution and subsequent abominations in the name of socialist justice in the 1980s and 1990s.

the police against this section of the community¹⁵. Official racist hostility at ports of entry into the country; abolition of the Race Relations Acts of 1967 and later 1976, the Race Relations Board and later the Commission for Racial Equality, because these measures and bodies were perceived to be used against black people or were tools 'for the purpose of maintaining the status quo', not changing it. The demands included, further, full employment, trial by peers, an end to racist education of children, representation of black people on school boards, and 'decent housing, bread, peace and social justice for all people', following the Panthers of Oakland, California.

Whilst the list of demands had remained consistent over the twenty one years,, they had also undergone subtle modifications, reflecting change as well as closer engagement and knowledge of the situation. For example, demand five of 1970 which spoke about returning superannuation and national insurance contributions to black people who return to their homelands was later omitted, no doubt because it was recognised that people returning to the Caribbean were indeed able to repatriate their contributions. Again, the later version of the demand to be tried by peers does not specify as the 1970 statement does that this means trial by black magistrates, judges and jurists. It is not clear whether this was because by the 1980s the point had been well made and partly accepted, or because the group's leaders had come to recognise that having black magistrates did not necessarily alleviate injustice and that their own emphasis on class as the major determinant factor was indeed the more powerful and relevant

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. This concern in the black communities in Britain was to continue and forcefully restated in the Stephen Lawrence Case, as set out in the McPherson Report of February 1999.

consideration in such matters. The later statement is also concerned about 'the discrepancy of sentences passed on Black/White "offenders"', reflecting how the debate over the judicial system had moved on. By the 1990s the demand for full employment was no longer the bland, abstract, statement it had been; the group now called for an 'end to all forms of discriminatory practices in employment', thereby reflecting change and development in its understanding of the complex employment market situation for black workers (see, Modood, *et al*, 1997).

The later statement contains two new important demands: first, 'an immediate repeal of the Immigration Act 1971, the repeal of the 1988 (sic) British Nationality Act ...'. The second new demand is for an 'end to all types of sexual discrimination and the ending of the exploitation of women by men'. These clearly reflected crucial developments since 1970, for although the group was deeply concerned about the status of women from its very beginning, the gender question was less sharply focused upon in British society in the early 1970s than it came to be in the late 1980s and the 1990s. From its very first issue the Black Voice carried specific articles on black women; some concentrated on the lives of black women in American and Caribbean lives such as Harriet Tubman who organised the underground escape route for runaway slaves to Canada, and Nanny of the Maroons in seventeenth century Jamaica. Contemporary women in sports, such as Marilyn Neufville the Jamaican Olympic gold medalist, and Angela Davis who was being prosecuted by the US authorities for her part in the black movement in that country. The paper also carried pieces on women in Vietnam, and other places where wars of liberation were being waged.

Apart from its formal statement of aims, objectives and broad principles, the BUFP articulated its ideology at its discussions, through its publications and in the causes it espoused. The next section considers some examples of the last of these. But for the remainder of this section I want to look at some of the main questions which the BUFP addressed and in doing so elaborated more generally its beliefs and principles.

The first of these was the question of the revolutionary potential of the working classes in advanced capitalism. This was, of course, a longstanding question within Marxism. Marx had argued that the world proletarian revolution would first occur in the advanced capitalist West where the proletariat was being transformed from a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself through class consciousness. In later life he became less certain of this by admitting that the revolution could start in Russia where German capital was making rapid progress in capitalising production and relations of production. It was the debate between Lenin's Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, leading to the break up of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party at the end of the nineteenth century, which clarified this issue. Lenin and his supporters held that capitalism had reached a new stage where it needed to export capital in order to continue to create surplus, and to defeat capitalism in the present age it was easier to break it at its weakest link. This would be in the periphery of capitalism, in the imperial hinterlands, not in the centres of capitalism. The revolution's success would, however, depend on the eventual revolution in these heartland by the proletariat.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917/8 came, but with the defeat of the Spartacists in Germany, Syndicalism in France, and Fabianism in England no revolution occurred in the West.

But revolution occurred in China, a farther hinterland from the centre of capital, in West Europe and N America. Moreover, the Chinese Communist Party, whilst preaching Marxism, had come to hold state power in 1949 after abandoning the cities following the debacle of 1927 at the hands of the nationalist Komingtang, two decades of fighting in the rural areas and eventually taking this fight to the cities. Fidel Castro's successful seizure of state power in Cuba in 1958 further demonstrated the seeming validity of the Leninist-Maoist principle of organised insurrection from outside the advanced centres of capitalism.

BUFP leaders were convinced that contemporary history revealed that revolutionary change could not be realistically expected to come from the workers of Europe and America. Lenin's thesis of the 'labour aristocracy'¹⁶ in the West seemed to be about right with respect to the behaviour of workers, particularly their leaders. Moreover, the working classes had imbibed the racism of the capitalists; workers, organised or otherwise, had allowed themselves to become divided, seeing colour or race or culture as being more important than objective class interests. In Maoist terms, they had allowed secondary, non-

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. Lenin argued, following Frederick Engels, that an aristocracy of labour had emerged in West Europe. This meant that with the emergence of reformist social-democratic parties and trades unions, capitalists were able to gain the support of the working classes by offering non-essential reforms of capitalism. Union leaders played a crucial part in this process, because it is through them that the 'deal', or class collaboration, has been effected.

antagonistic contradictions to over-ride the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour. This fundamental basis for organised opposition to, and resistance of, exploitation and the divide and rule tactics of capitalists, was seen to be frustrated and revolutionary action by white workers and their organisations was not to be expected in the foreseeable future.

With migration, however, black workers from the neo-colonial world had come to the centre of capitalism. Racism had become a further tool of divide and rule. Whiteness united white workers with their white capitalist bosses against black workers. There were few black capitalists to speak of; and the black petite bourgeoisie (intellectuals, bureaucrats, small capitalists, etc.) would vacillate between support for the working classes and support for the capitalists and the oppressors of black people. In these circumstances, black workers were placed at the forefront of revolutionary politics in Britain. They constituted the most exploited, the most marginalized and therefore the most class conscious element within the wider working classes. A particular historical responsibility, therefore, fell to the black worker. This position pitched the BUFP against those who held firmly to a Eurocentric view derived from Marx, the Mensheviks and particularly Trotsky whose followers felt that they were carrying forward the authentic principles against heretics such as Stalin, Mao, Castro, and others.

A second question over which the BUFP's position was very clear, if unorthodox amongst black groups, was colonial wars of liberation. The group agreed that these must be situated within the broader context of the class struggles, and not

be seen as essentially a struggle between black and white people. This was particularly relevant and important with respect to Africa. In the contention for supremacy between different radical groups in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa, the BUFP sought to support those groups which presented a class position coupled with the notion of 'people's' struggle for national liberation as the first step towards emancipation from capitalism and imperialism. Thus, the BUFP supported the ANC in South Africa, SWAPO in Namibia and MPLA in Angola, because these were groups which sought to organise the 'whole people' irrespective of class, colour or creed against the common enemy of colonialism. But these were also groups which sought to see things in class, not racial, terms; imperialism was being opposed, not the colour of the oppressors.

Third, the BUFP sought to impress on its members and the black community that the just hunger for a closer knowledge of the history of blacks in Africa and the West and the promotion of black culture was not enough to put an end to capitalist and racist oppression and exploitation. At the same time, it was important for the BUFP to emphasise that given the history of white working class organisations which marginalised black workers' interests, it was important for blacks to organise themselves autonomously. This view was also supported by the observation that where white liberals joined black organisations their superior resources usually result in whites controlling the agenda. Additionally, to maintain its independence of thought and action, the BUFP was consistent in refusing to accept funding from national or local government departments, or foundations. Although it supported the socialist block of countries, it maintained

its independent political position from them by not aligning itself to any national or international group, and therefore unwittingly, reflected the healthy scepticism of radical Third World leaders such as Abdul Nasser of Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana who, with other radicals, founded the Non-Alligned Movement in response to the Cold War.

Community aspects of the group's activities

Whilst it is important to look at a group's stated aims and objectives, and to take into consideration their ideological orientation, it is their activities which best help us to define them. This may be particularly true with respect to Commonwealth Caribbean groups, which, as noted in the last chapter, are prone to establish elaborate constitutional devices without doing the necessary practical work to make their organisations the living and dynamic bodies they sometimes appear to be from the outside. Following the schema of group types and activities outlined in the last chapter, it should be noted that most of the activities in which the BUFP engaged were essentially of a community welfare nature. This does not negate the fact that the intended purpose was mainly to raise political consciousness in order to better struggle against what the group saw as exploitation and oppression.

From its very beginning, the group engaged itself in a number of social or community welfare activities. Such activities varied from the organising and

running of a summer and alternative school for black children, to defending black youngsters against attacks on the streets. Activities ranged from defending black workers, to critically assessing women's roles in the workplace and the household. These issues were raised at meetings, discussion groups and in publications such as leaflets and the Black Voice. The group adopted a tough line against what was described as 'male chauvinism', and drug taking; for these offences members could be suspended or expelled. Like most Marxist-Leninist groups, the BUFP advocated what amounted to a late Victorian bourgeois morality which eschewed excess of any kind such as heavy drinking, promoted the strict utilisation of time, and displayed what Max Weber described as the Calvinist Protestant ethic of hard work, discipline, and accountability for individual action underpinned by a this-worldly asceticism (see, Weber, 1930). 'Good manners', exemplary behaviour, cleanliness, orderly behaviour were all virtues to adhere to, particularly when out on the streets selling newspapers, distributing leaflets, and at public demonstrations.

Although not the first to raise the question, the BUFP was perhaps the first group in the country to organise alternative schooling for black children¹⁷ who had been marginalised by local education authorities and schools. The publication of Bernard Coard's (1971) How the British education system underdeveloped the black child by New Beacons Publishers had an immediate impact on the founders of the BUFP. The group organised in 1971 a summer school for black children who were placed in educationally subnormal schools. These children

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. Of course, the early beginnings of the black churches in the 1950s and 1960s in the rooms of devout families and individuals, involved holding Sunday schools in much the same way as these alternative classes were organised.

were drawn mainly from the boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham. The school was held mainly in Deptford, on premises provided by the Church of England, when a number of local schools refused to help with what was then perceived by many as a subversive action by hotheads. Again, in 1972 the BUFP organised another summer school for these children, and with the help of Sybil Phoenix the veteran Guyanese community worker premises were provided at 77 Pagnell Street, New Cross. During the year classes in maths, English and history were conducted in members' homes for a smaller group of children. The summer schools had about 50 children, and outings to zoos and other places of interests were organised as well as a one-week holiday by the sea in 1972. The subjects offered were deliberately limited to English, history (black, Caribbean, US and African), and maths (subjects neglected in their schooling), art and drama. Table-tennis, badminton, football, chess, draught, and swimming were also offered at break times and for specific periods, with teachers and helpers actively participating.

The teaching and Summer school experiences were intended to achieve three principal aims and objectives: first, developing the children's skills in the traditional 'three Rs' of reading, writing and arithmetic. In several cases the children had to be taught these rudimentary skills which their schools had claimed these children could not be taught because they were educationally sub-normal. It was important to teach English in a manner that would properly situate, and not ignore or marginalise, the creole the children spoke at home with their parents and spoke in groups at school. The second aim was to redress the

imbalance in the regular school curriculum by teaching the children about their own neglected backgrounds in Africa and the Caribbean; to acquaint them with names, events, places, and achievements of black people; to help develop a framework within which they would understand their own and their parents' presence and position in British society and how they, like others before, could help to change the situation. These helped, thirdly, to develop their confidence in themselves as young black people in a world almost entirely owned, controlled and defined by the white majority society in which they lived. In the wider black world the Afro-hair style, the musicians, sportsmen and sportswomen, politicians and artists of black America were recreating an environment of black worth and value to which British blacks could relate across the Atlantic. The teaching of specific subjects could help to fill in the details missing in the collective knowledge of a people experiencing the loss of their illusions see, Carter, 1986; Cross and Entzinger, 1988).

It was hoped that the total experience would result in the children not only having a stronger sense of self and history or background, but that they would also develop a deep commitment to their own communities. It was therefore important that the children gained confidence in their teachers, experience the caring environment their parents would have enjoyed at schools in the Caribbean, and for them to realize that although nearly all their school teachers were white people, black people were also capable of imparting the knowledge they would need for forging their own individual paths through life in a competitive society.

Thus, whilst small grants and support were secured from public bodies in order to help with this specific project, the initiative, organisation, work, teaching and so forth were conducted by black schoolteachers, sixth-formers and undergraduates as well as other BUFP members with relevant experience.

In 1972 the BUFP was joined by the Croydon Collective in mounting the summer project. The alternative school experience was a challenge not only for the children, but also for the teachers and helpers, because they themselves had to learn some of what they were teaching. Whilst they were able to draw on black American experience, there was nothing comparable in Britain from which to learn. This was because Caribbean groups in Britain had not yet developed the institutions they required for survival in a society based on (white) ethnicity which automatically excluded the black 'other'. The black-led churches were both an exception to this and also partly a symptom of British exclusivity. Paradoxically, however, the black churches' proximity to white churches and the sharing of a common faith by black and white practising Christians, prevented the black churches being active participants in the youths' radical protest against marginalisation. The churches' message seemed too quietist in the face of massive police brutality and state repression; to the churches, the radicalism of black youths was simply bewildering. Yet, in the longer view, the different forms of social action in which black radicalism and the conservative churches were respectively involved, were largely responses to more general processes of exclusion in British society. Both responses - of conservative quietism and

militant radicalism - were also deeply rooted in Caribbean social and political traditions and these were being established in the emergent Caribbean diaspora in England.

The BUFP's concern with the young in the black community in South London and elsewhere brought them into conflict not only with the education authorities (which were initially hostile to the alternative school initiative because they did not control it), but also with the police and the courts. There have been several dramatic instances of such confrontations throughout the period which was marked by community activism. Demonstrations against legislation, such as the 1971 Immigration Act in specific localities with significant black settlement involved sharp confrontation with the police, and were covered in the South London Press. Attacks on members of the group by the police in the early 1970s led to several confrontations and locally celebrated court cases. The group's support, for example, of the struggles of others such as the Irish against the 1971 Internment Act, or the trades unions' demonstrations against the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, again led the BUFP into confrontation with the authorities. As the decade drew to a close, the group became deeply involved with what came to be known as the New Cross Massacre on its doorsteps. With respect to the black community and the police and the courts, two well documented events will suffice to make this general point.

First, the Peckham Rye confrontation of 1971. During the second and third weeks of September, 1971 Peckham Rye Park had its longstanding traditional

summer fair. According to the proprietor of the travelling fair, the company had been coming to the Rye since 1946 and before handing over the usual cheque (£900 that year) to the mayor of Southwark he expressed the hope that they would be continuing to do so for the years ahead. The remark regarding the future was occasioned by the tumultuous events of the week which took Peckham by storm and occupied much of the South London Press (hereafter, the SLP or the Press) from Tuesday 14 to Tuesday 21 September with headline stories, opinion/editorial, and letters from the public. The events they described involved the BUFP in its work as protector of vulnerable black youths - many of them schoolchildren - against the police. These events reflected the growing confrontation between black youth and the police, which was to explode in the early 1980s in Brixton in Lambeth, Toxteth in Liverpool and St Paul's in Bristol (see, Scarman, 1981). Indeed, at the very time of these events a House of Commons' select committee was hearing evidence on the deteriorating relations between the police and the black community.

On 14 September, the Press's main front page story read: 'Gangs of youths roam Peckham Rye, MOBS AT FAIRGROUND BATTLE WITH POLICE'. The paper reported that angry traders and residents were calling for an end to the fair

... following a week of trouble from mobs of youths, mostly coloured and frequently as many as 200 strong, congregating in the grounds and providing a big headache for local police who were out in force backed by men of Scotland Yard's special patrol squad, for the last four nights until the fair closed on Saturday evening (SLP, Tuesday, 14 September, 1971, p. 1).

These dramatic events were triggered on the evening of Tuesday 7 September

when, according to this account, a stall-holder was stabbed and 'several youths arrested'. A 'full-scale anti-violence campaign was mounted with police in pairs and groups of three, together with dogs, patrolling the fair ground' (ibid.). The dramatic clash between the police and the youths first occurred, however, on Friday night after the fair closed at 10.30, and some 200 youths surrounded the bumper cars area of the grounds. The lights were dimmed, and the youths moved to the corner of East Dulwich Road where the special squad police in two large vans awaited them. After ten minutes the youths walked along Rye Lane towards the centre of Peckham. The windows of a laundrette, a furniture store, a hairdresser's saloon and a greeting cards shop were broken. The following evening, the fair was closed early at 9.45 in the evening 'on the advice of the police', and the evening went on peacefully, according to the Press. Even so, there were 11 arrests made by the police. These included young people ranging from age 17 to 28 from Peckham and the surrounding areas of Lewisham, Dulwich, Forest Hill, New Cross and even far away Tooting, on charges of damage to property, and various counts of assaults on police officers.

On Friday 17 September the Press continued the story under the front page headline 'Hooligan gangs threaten the fairs'. The London secretary of the Showmen's Guild, a Mr Bill Bailey, was reported as saying that the incident of black youths and police confrontation at fair grounds '... is a new menace we are facing all round, but particularly in the past year at places like Reading where there are large immigrant populations' (SLP, 17 September, 1971, p. 1). In his view these events were taking place all over the country, and fair managers were

loosing money as the violence kept people away from the grounds. Earlier in the year, he said, in June when the fair was on the Rye there had been minor incidents, and while he did not say whether those events were caused by black youths there was the implication that these youths were responsible. Of particular concern to Mr Bailey, however, was the fear that the disturbances at fair grounds were politically motivated. He stated that

We find usually that these gangs have their own photographers around to take pictures whenever the police are forced to grab hold of them and it seems they are deliberately provoking the police (ibid.)¹⁸.

The main headline on the same page read 'Immigrant dispersal crucial, RACE COMMITTEE BACKS LAMBETH ALL THE WAY'. The housing problems of the neighbouring borough of Lambeth were leading to poor living conditions for blacks and this was fuelling militancy among teenagers, which in turn was '... straining the previously tolerant attitude of the white community' (ibid.).

'Black Unity hit at police, RYE-La. PROTEST MARCH AGAINST ARRESTS AT FAIR', was the main headline on the front page of the Press on Tuesday 21, September. It described the march of about 100 protesters '... 70 of them black, chanting slogans alleging police brutality at last week's fair ...' (SLP, Tuesday 21 September, 1971, p. 1) along Rye Lane in the afternoon of Saturday 17 September. The chants included, 'down with the police pigs', 'more racist attacks on black youths', and so forth. There were leaflets describing the action of the police at the fair, and the police's attempts to '... frighten, harass and brutalise

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. Of course, where there were cameras these were used in the belief that pictures would show the police attacking black youths. This would also have the effect of making the police think carefully before attacking these youths.

black people as individuals and the black community as a whole' (ibid.). The leaflets called for unity, and pointed to the high incidence of black people in prisons. The event passed without incident, and the police community liaison officer, Chief Inspector Douglas Turner, expressed pleasure and confidence that it would not damage community relations '... because the white population were not interested in the demonstration or the leaflets that were being handed out' [Ibid.]. The report stated that black shoppers also 'ignored' the marchers, and that many of the marchers came from North London.

The BUFP had, however, planned a short, effective and peaceful demonstration during the shopping hours along Rye Lane. As noted, whilst it was organised by blacks, many of the protesters were whites who were also concerned about the behaviour of the police. Contrary to police reports, the group never went out to cause disturbances. Indeed, it was the BUFP's view that the police should have been congratulated for not causing a disturbance. These were, after all, protests against the police, not 'race riots'. The community relations officers of both Lewisham and Southwark, Asquith Gibbes and David Asphat respectively, told the press how members of the public had reported to them that the police had simply rounded up youths who were not involved in any of the incidents during the week, and they as CRCs were convening conferences between the police, local community workers and the BUFP. From the police's report too it is clear that the BUFP informed them of the march, and the group controlled the events of the day.

For the first time in these reports there is mention of involvement by an organised group, although there is still the view that there were 'gangs' at work. These 'gangs' were never named, and no one was ever found to be a member. The BUFP's leaflets informed the public that the events at the fair and subsequent developments started when on the Tuesday evening fair attendants beat a black school boy, Radcliff Carr, unconscious while the police looked on without intervening. The paper quoted a BUFP spokesperson, Garfield James (a teacher at one of the local schools), as saying that reports had only given one side of the story, ignoring what black youths themselves had been saying. There had been no trouble at the fair at the beginning, but the heavy police presence and intimidation after refusing to stop a child being beaten to a state of unconsciousness necessitated that the young people organise themselves to prevent further intimidation and arrests. James concluded

While I do not justify the breaking of windows which took place in Rye Lane, it is fair to say that the youths had been forced to walk down the lane regardless of where they came from - and not everyone lives in Peckham - and they were pushed by the police (ibid.).

The Press's editorial for the day was headed 'Not all fun at Peckham's fair', and it argued that the traditional fun occasioned by such events was being turned upside down by

... the mass hooliganism of teenagers, nearly all of them black, who not only tried to intimidate the showmen, alarmed the general public by rowdily walking en masse down the approach roads, but also seemed hell-bent on testing their emergent manhood against the scores of police who had to be drafted to the fair to break up the gangs before trouble flared in (sic) a large scale (ibid.).

The police and fair managers were exonerated, and black male teenagers were seen to be the cause of the disturbances; 'the fair was made the target for a hooligan demonstration and an uncomfortable feeling is left that it was not unpremeditated' (ibid.). However, the fair had moved on to Bermondsey '... an area not very near the recognised immigrant centres in South London.' (ibid.).

The BUFP's Black Voice gave a somewhat different account of events. Under the heading 'BLACK YOUTHS TERRORIZED BY POLICE IN PECKHAM' the paper argued that between 7-11 September

... was a week of terror for all the Black youths in the Peckham area. It was impossible for any youth to walk in the streets without being harassed by the police (Black Voice, vol 2, no 4, nd. but presumably Sept 1971, p 6).

The paper reported that 14 year old Radcliff had been beaten by 8 fair attendants; the attackers used hammers, iron-bars, and spanners. One eye was dislodged from its socket, and not only did the police not intervene but prevented any one administering first-aid; the Red Cross Unit which was at the scene also failed to give any aid. The white attackers, still brandishing their weapons went free while the police set about attacking witnesses, mainly young black people. Carr was hospitalised for 7 days, received 30 stitches to his head, his left eye pushed back into its socket, and his body badly bruised and swollen.

The following evening the police increased their numbers, brought in dogs and surrounded groups of black people at the fair. One black man who opened his

door to see what the commotion was about was beaten and arrested by the police; a white man who witnessed the action of the police and who went to the station to make a report was beaten and thrown out; a white girl who on witnessing ten policemen beating one black youth went to protest, was herself thrown into the police van and beaten. The report is a catalogue of similar individual cases. At the police station legal representatives were denied access, and parents and other relatives ill treated.

The only organisation of the crowd was provided on the Friday night by the BUFP, encouraging the young people to stay together in a disciplined fashion and not respond to the provocation of the police as they deliberately attacked individuals and hurled racist insults at individuals. On the last night of the fair, there were an estimated 400 police officers, and immediately on closure of the fair, all lights went off with the police attacking any black person they came across in the vicinity. Desperately trying to escape, small groups of black youths found themselves miles from their homes, taking circuitous routes in order to evade the police cordon thrown around the Peckham area.

The BUFP charged the police with assault, riotous assembly and causing an affray, and fabrication of charges against black citizens. Like the American Black Panthers the group called for the police to be put on trial for their crimes against the people. But it was not until the McPherson Report into the Stephen Lawrence Case in 1998/9 that the London Metropolitan Police admitted that as a force they were guilty of 'institutional racism' (McPherson, 1999). The earlier

Scarman Report (1981) into the Brixton disturbances discussed the issue but studiously avoided using the concept to describe the behaviour of the police in England.

At a more general level of community, the BUFP worked closely with groups similar to itself in the area to highlight such increasing incidence of police attacks on individual black men and women as distinct from what the police had come to regard as the rowdy black youth. Before the early 1970s police attacks on blacks were not infrequent but these appeared to be restricted in the main to young, active men out for a good time at fairs, outside cinemas or at club and house parties. There have long been close watch kept on groups of black workers from the early 1950s, and was not something new in the early 1970s. After the first years of the 1970s police brutality against black communities in the inner cities was to become so commonplace that it was widely believed in the black communities that there was hardly a black family in Britain which had not had a nasty experience with the police. In the 1990s this has continued to be the focus of much public attention, with a disproportionately high number of individuals of African-Caribbean backgrounds housed in the nation's prisons, and an even higher proportion seen the inside of courts and police cells. The beginning of the decade of the 1970s, however, marked the watershed in the generalisation of poor police-black community relations. As we now know, the subsequent confrontations between the black community and the police has led to a generalised questioning of the nature of the police force, policing and accountability in the country as a whole.

Central to this process was the Brixton disturbance of 1981, and subsequent events in leading British cities in that year and again in 1985. It may be suggested, however, that the basic attitudes of Britain's black communities to the police were formed in the early 1970s, when for the first time the authorities confronted Britain's first generation of black youths. These were young men and women who had been either born or brought up in these cities, with little or no practical knowledge of the Caribbean, and certainly none of Africa which featured prominently in their rhetoric. A deep-rooted legacy from those days is the view that blacks should not join the police force, because it is inherently racist, and black recruits would tacitly be supporting the brutalisation of their communities. Campaigns mounted by police authorities in several English cities to attract recruits from new minority ethnic communities, particularly black communities in subsequent years have met with relatively little success.

There were several incidents between the black community at large and the police and the courts during these years, as a perusal of the files of the BUFP shows. As noted, The South London Press is also an invaluable source of wider public confirmation of police-community relations during these crucial years. The Joshua Francis story is a case in point.

But Francis's case must be situated within the general local context of South London. On Wednesday 5 April, 1972 the Press featured three short articles on the same page entitled, respectively, 'W. INDIANS OPEN FIGHT FOR JAILED

JAMAICAN', 'National Front demand: Sack this Communist', and 'Stresses between black and white focus on police relations'. The last of these commented on a report commissioned by the Bishop of Woolwich into police-community relations. The working group comprised Canon Eric James who had been vicar of St Giles's in Camberwell and St George's in Peckham, the treasurer of Southwark Diocesan Council for Social Aid, a member of Southwark Council's Welfare Department, and a member of the National Institute for Social Work Training. The report covered problems of housing, mental health, alcoholism, drug addiction, and homelessness and 'immigrants'. The group's concern about relations between whites and blacks led them to conclude that these were focused in the relations between young black people and the police. Quoting the report the article stated that, 'It is alleged, rightly or wrongly, that the police discriminate against coloured immigrants', which not surprisingly was denied by the police. White families were perceived to be afraid of people with black skins, because whites felt that blacks would take by force school places, homes and jobs which belonged whites. The article went on to say the report warned that

Black Power feeds on this because it gives the movement a very euphoric sensation and enables the participants to reject the often pathetic and patronising attitudes of the white intellectual liberals (SLP, 5 April 1972).

Black communities in South London, the report warned, were turning inward, becoming hostile towards white society, and mistrustful of officialdom. The various black political organisations would have the '... capacity to act violently

against white society', because of the growing number of unemployed youths with little or no education. At the same time the report asserted that 'Black leadership is scarce ...' (Ibid.).

The second article reported the circulation of 11,000 leaflets by the National Front against Asquith Gibbes, Lewisham's Community Relations Officer, whom the Front claimed was a member of the Communist party and therefore too biased to occupy his sensitive position. The Front pointed out that Gibbes was attacked because he was a 'red-hot communist', not because he was black. Gibbes, naturally enough, defended his political freedom. The fact of his blackness remained, however, the unstated main interest in the Front's attack on his integrity.

As will be noted from the large prints of the first article, the case of Joshua Francis was by far the most important of the three features on 5 April, 1972. The events it reported marked a turning point in the developing story of community-police relations in the black communities in South London. The article opened with the statement that 'Brixton's black community last week mobilized a massive action campaign to raise funds for an appeal against the conviction of West Indian Joshua Francis who is now serving a nine-month jail sentence for assaulting two policemen'[SLP,....]. The occasion was the launching of an appeal at Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton at which several hundred¹⁹ people attended.

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. The Press reported that there were 200 people present, but this number appears to have been a way of saying that there was a large body of people, because the number turns up again and again in the major events reported during this period. In any event, there was unlikely to be an actual count, and only an estimation was possible.

Speakers included the legal attaché at the Jamaican High Commission, Alan Alberga, representatives from the Association of Jamaicans (AOJ), Lambeth Council for Community Relations, WISC, the BPM, Rev Robert Nind of St Matthews church²⁰, the BUFP and other organisations in South London. The coverage of the event stressed the points made by Alberga and Rev Nind, and little was said about the BUFP, the BPM and other community-based groups. It was, however, these groups which had played the major part in organising the event under the aegis of Joshua Francis Defence Committee [JFDC], which attracted a number of groups and individuals.

The Committee was formed around the case of Joshua Francis, a 38 year old Jamaican who worked at London Transport garage at Thornton Heath. Early on Sunday morning 22 November, 1970 an off duty police officer and three other men from an all-night garage chased a man to Francis's backyard. Francis, who had been in bed suffering from a broken jaw as a result of an industrial accident, became involved in the ensuing struggle. He was severely beaten, dragged over broken glass and taken to a cell half naked by the other officers who arrived on the scene. At King's College Hospital in Camberwell he received three stitches in the forehead, two on the left index finger, and three in the left shin; he had cuts on both hips and right buttock, grazes on the right calf and the left knee, bruises on the left foot, and was tender in the genitals, kidneys, neck, right arm and over his rib cage. After a 23 day trial at Croydon Crown Court on 7 March, 1972 he was found guilty on three counts of assaults on the police officers by

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. The church - which is situated within the town's largest roundabout directly opposite Lambeth Town Hall together with this and the town's library forms a triangle - is now Brixton Caribbean Centre.

judge S A Morton and sentenced to nine months imprisonment. The Black Voice and the group's leaflets published pictures of a beaten Francis in hospital.

A deeply religious man and part-time preacher in his local church, Joshua was widely known to live (in biblical terms) in fear of God and the law. His experience alerted many throughout London to what appeared to be a new turn in police-black community relations. He was no party-going young man out for the fun of an evening; he was a solid family and community person, who though ill felt secure in his home before being dragged into court and made a criminal for assaulting a number of fit policemen who violently intruded into his quiet life. If a person such as he was not safe from the police, then who in the black community was safe from the long arm of injustice, which had the sanction of the state's legal instruments.

At the meeting in Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton, Alan Alberga stressed that the Jamaican Commission was finding the behaviour of the British police to be so unwarranted in a number of cases that the High Commission no longer regarded this as '... a problem. I call it an illness and we who are here on behalf of the Government of Jamaica find it extremely difficult to cure' (SLP, *ibid*). Although the black community in Britain looked to their High Commissions for representation to the British authorities, Alberga confirmed the view of many that community action would have a much greater impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the police and the courts, than anything others such as Commonwealth governments could do.

Founded in February, the Joshua Francis Defence Committee changed its name to the Black People's Defence Committee after Francis's conviction was upheld on 3 July, but he himself released from prison. The Committee held its first and all its subsequent meetings at 1 Mayall Road, Brixton, at the offices of the Brixton Neighbourhood Centre under the leadership of the late community veteran campaigner, Courtney Laws. Meeting early on Saturday mornings, the Committee brought together activists and members from a wide range of groups, including those mentioned above as well as the Croydon Collective from Selhurst led by Lloyd Blake. The chairman, Cliff Lynch, was the public relations officer of WISC, and the BUFP provided two representatives who acted as secretary and legal adviser respectively to the Committee. At one point or another, individuals such as the late Dr David (later Lord) Pitt, Cecil Collier (Association of Jamaicans), Len Dyke (Dyke & Dryden and WISC), Joe Hunte (WISC), David Asphat (CRC), the late Rudy Narayan the radical Guyanese barrister and several other individuals became involved with the case or the campaign. Planned activities ranged from public demonstrations in Brixton (within the Town Hall, Library and St Matthews church triangle) to social events to raise funds for Francis's case and others which were later taken on by the Committee.

The change of name from JFDC to BPDC was due to the successful campaign to release Francis, and the recognition that his case was no longer an exception, but was, rather, becoming a familiar part of the experience of many ordinary black

men and women lawfully going about their business. The Committee's campaign led to many individuals from black and Asian communities writing in to offer their support and to make donations of money. The Committee organised, with local groups, a number of meetings throughout London, and planned meetings in Liverpool and elsewhere, which were addressed by individuals such as Len Dyke, Francis himself, Farouk Dhondi, and others. An appeal fund was established, leaflets distributed, prisoners and their families visited and solicitors contacted. The Committee's successes were not only helping to free Francis, highlighting the cases of others such as Edward Cole²¹, but demonstrating that the various groups in the area, irrespective of their ideological bent, were able to unite over specific forms of action necessary to defend the community.

Conclusion

The events described here were to become increasingly common as police-black community relations deteriorated in the face of massive police brutality against black youths and then the community as a whole. Police behaviour, coupled with an effective non-education for young black people by schools and education authorities, large-scale unemployment, etc., fuelled black protest on the streets from the 1970s. Groups such as the BUFP worked to control and

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. A Trinidadian young man with a young family, Edward Cole was found guilty of assaulting about forty hefty policemen single-handedly outside his home in Waterloo. Neighbours and passers-by told a different story, but the court allowed the police to have their way. This had a profoundly negative impact on family members.

channel such protest, but by the late 1970s it was clear that organised groups had failed to galvanise and control such powerful social forces. Thus, although groups such as the BUFP would see themselves as being primarily political, in essence their work was one of community building, but their community work was guided by well thought out and deeply committed political perspectives. While not strictly of a political nature, that is, competing for public office on a general platform, such work nonetheless prepared the community for the more radical direct political participation of Britain's black population in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s to the turn of the century, as outlined in the last chapter. Of equal significance, however, was the use made of Africa and the Caribbean as sources of strength for the emerging communities in Britain. The issues raised and the sources of inspiration were to become central pillars in the consciousness of these communities.