

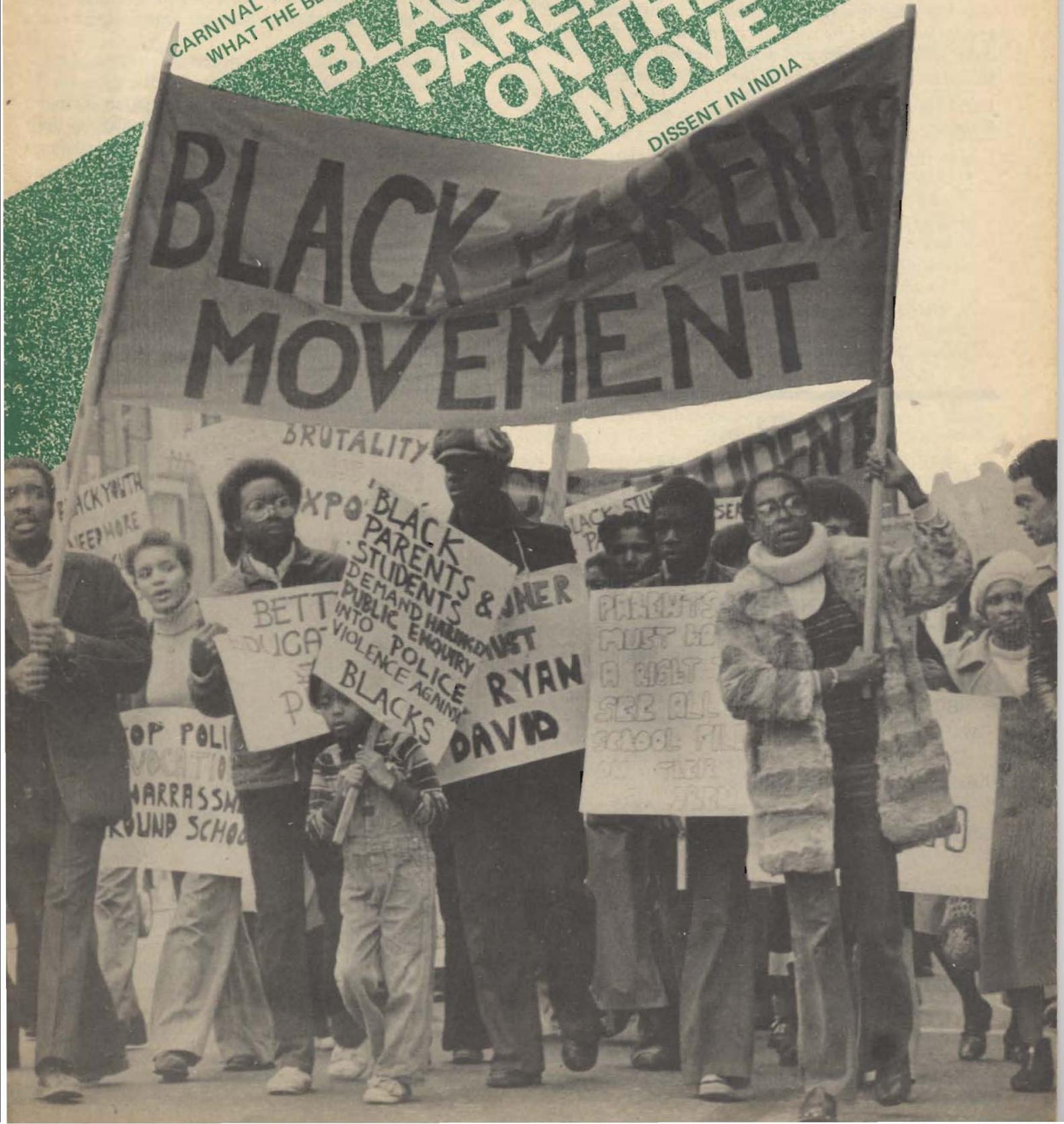
Race Today

VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN OCTOBER 1976 25p

CARNIVAL '76:
WHAT THE BBC DID NOT SAY

BLACK PARENTS ON THE MOVE

DISSENT IN INDIA



BLACK STUDENTS AND PARENTS WANT THE MOVE TO STREETS

BLACK
PARENTS &
STUDENTS
DEMAND HARKED
PUBLIC ENQUIRY
INTO POLICE
VIOLENCE AGAINST
BLACKS

BLACK
PARENTS &
STUDENTS
DEMAND HARKED
PUBLIC ENQUIRY

BETTER
EDUCATION
FOR
BLACK
PUPILS

BETTER
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POLICE
TOP
BACKING
LACK
SOUTH

TOTTENHAM
MUSICIANS
COUNCIL IS
RUBBING
THEY

All photographs Akua Rugg, Race Today Collective Association.

The Black Students and Black Parents Movements have been involved, particularly in the North London area, in organising unemployed youth, students and parents in the West Indian community into a force capable of waging a struggle against police oppression and the legal system. Not only has the *Race Today* Collective supported these organisations but our members are active in building both these movements.

We believe the experiences of both groups and the methods of struggle they are evolving are important in assisting others in building and developing similar organisations in black communities throughout the country.

To this end, we reproduce extracts from speeches made by parents at a recent public meeting held in North London.

I want to welcome all of you who have made it possible to come to this meeting today in connection with the struggles that the Black Parents Movement and the Black Students Movement have been waging over the last 18 months, more particularly over the last two or three months in connection with the education system, in connection with the police, in connection with the State. The purpose of this meeting is to inform those of us who are present about the cases which will soon be heard at the Tottenham magistrates court.

The Wood Green case will be heard at the Tottenham magistrates court from October 4 – 11. Now most people here have seen the leaflet which we published – the BPM and BSM published – called “Dem Police Again”. And some of you may have read the letter which we sent to the Home Secretary concerning that incident.

It is necessary for the people who are here present with us to know that we don't only take responsibility for these cases ourselves and the organising of these cases, but also we have been planning the political campaigns around those cases in the courts.

Besides the Wood Green case, there are four young school children who were arrested – as happens frequently – by the police in Oxford Street on what everybody calls ‘sus’, that is, suspicion of committing an arrestable offence. We have been working on this case as well during the last two to three months. And then there has been the case of the six women, including one schoolgirl, who were beaten up in the Harlesden area about two to three months ago, who have been to court already and there was a demonstration and a picket outside the court. When the incident occurred there were over 200 people outside the police station in the area and the BPM and BSM have been part of a defence committee which has been meeting in that area of London to deal with this particular case – the case of the six women who were beaten up in Harlesden outside the Burning Spear Club not long ago.

A speaker during this meeting will be dealing with

why we deal with the cases in the way we are dealing with the cases, because that's a very important point that we wish to make to the members of other organisations, to the members of our own organisation – the reason why we have been approaching the cases in the way that we have approached the cases. Because we think it is absolutely necessary to fight the immediate struggles that people experience, this immediate experience of police violence and the police oppression which is an everyday experience of the black community, and to fight that experience in a particular kind of way which gives self-confidence and organises the black community to fight its own oppression.

And finally, we have been involved, through a member of the BSM who was arrested, with the Notting Hill Riots 1976, also through our connections with groups of people in the area with whom we have been working in connection with the Notting Hill Riots. So, the meeting will attempt to give you some idea of what we are trying to do around these cases. We shall also ask you to contribute to the discussion of the meeting by asking questions, by discussing what we have to say, and we shall be very pleased to exchange opinions in the course of the meeting.

The BPM and BSM came into existence – for the information of those who are unaware – on April 17 and 20 of 1975, just after the arrest of a black student. The organisation which we got going at such short notice was only possible because of the work that black students and black parents had been doing around the area in connection with the black education movement and the black education struggle. Like all other organisations we have faced our crises and overcome them. We have been faced with our internal struggles inside our organisation and we have clarified our ideological position, and we hope if not before the end of the year, early next year, to organise our conference to put out our documents concerning the position we have taken as a result of the experience we have had during these two years of work.

WHERE WE STAND

We believe at this important period where the black working class faces strikes, unemployment in the railway and the post office, where the youth and older black working class is in constant conflict with the police and education authorities, with the State at every level, through individual acts of oppression that we suffer, through this capitalist system of oppression, that at this particular moment, it has become necessary to clarify for ourselves where we are going and how we intend to go about what we are trying to do.

We stand for the independent, black, radical and revolutionary organisation of black people. We stand for that and we also stand for linking our struggles with other groups in the society – linking our struggles together and working out our ideological position as we link our struggles together. We see the country today as a country of nationalities – the English, the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish, the Greeks, the Blacks and the Asians, which would also include the Indians, the Pakistanis, the Bangladeshis. And we know that inside each of these nationalities, there is

an internal struggle that takes place between the oppressed section of that group and those [of the group] who are prepared to use the State against the interests of those who are oppressed. . . .

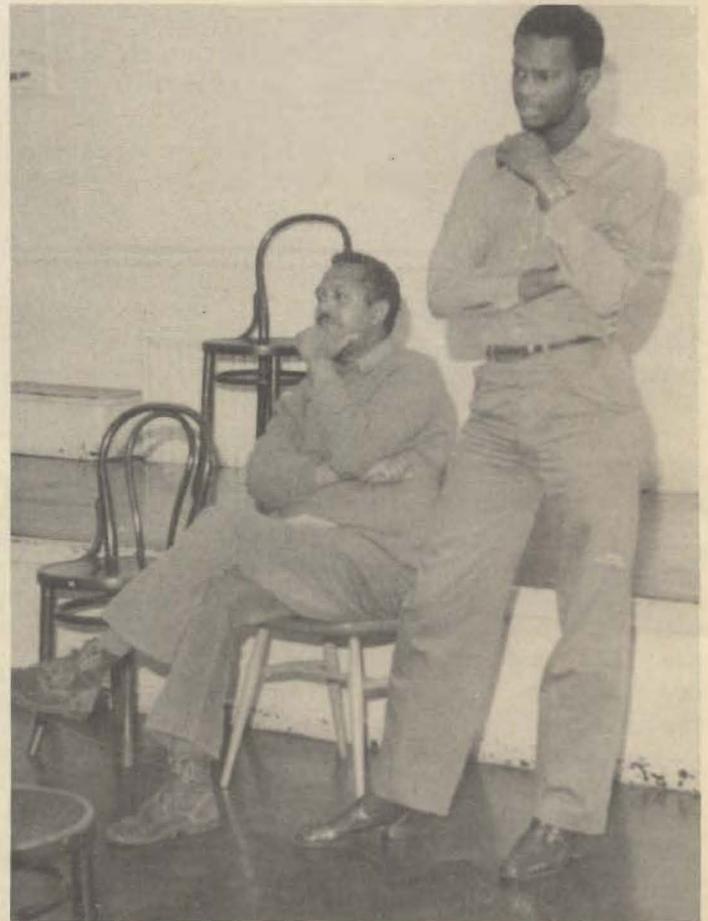
The point, which the last speaker has mentioned, that I want to emphasise, concerning the cases of those involved in the Notting Hill Riots, is this. He said there were certain organisations who are involved in community services who were in some way responsible for the campaign around those cases. It is necessary to point out two things in connection with this. The first is the BPM and the BSM are taking a stand, a position, with regard to the Community Relations organisation, the Community Relations Commission, the Community Relations industry. The stand which the BPM takes is, that the Community Relations organisation and the Community Relations industry is a kind of colonial office for the black community in this country, which seeks to undermine the independent organisational activity of the black population in dealing with its own struggles. We have seen how this has worked, and to some extent it has succeeded in undermining the independent organisation of black people in various parts of London. It's paid for by the State, in the sense that the State pays for the Community Relations industry and the Community Relations organisations at a price that is cheap, considering the extent to which the State feels challenged by this constant activity of the black youth all over the country at this moment.

But it appears to be a new kind of objective that the state has had in introducing the Urban Aid Programme. In introducing the Urban Aid Programme, it gets housing through the black organisations even cheaper than the State normally pays for it at the present moment. This is to say, what does the State

have to pay for housing if the blacks live in hostels? It costs them less through the Urban Aid Programme to the black organisations who are responsible for carrying out that hostel programme among the black youth.

The other aspect that is important to observe, is the extent to which these organisations appear to be messianic organisations which take over from the people involved themselves in organising their own struggles to deal with the problems they've got to face. And, therefore, when these very organisations seek to mobilise at some later stage around any given issue, their capacity for mobilisation is not there because the youth in their court cases, their various struggles with the housing authorities, with their employment and so on, are not themselves organised to deal with these particular cases, and the Urban Aid messiah takes over, with the result that it does not allow for the organisation of the black community around their problems. It's important to point that out, to see the weakness of this approach to the question and to say why we are opposed to this kind of way of dealing with the problem.

Equally, when it comes to the Law Centres. It is not that we are against people who work in Law Centres or even against the people who are working in Community Relations. We take a stand because we see how they defeat the purpose of the black community, the black youth, the older black working class, the parents seeking to organise themselves to deal with their problems. That's why we take a stand against it. We point to the weakness of this kind of political approach to these problems and to the white left organisations who believe that the community relations councils are things to work with.



THE TRADE IN BLACK DEFENDANTS

I would like to pick up on something that the last speaker has said, which is, that in the BPM we take responsibility totally for the organisation of our cases. There are particular reasons for this. Perhaps it might be useful to begin first by outlining the experience we have rejected and what that experience is.

Now, if you go to any magistrates court any day of the week you will get confronted with exactly the same scene. You arrive at the court. Outside in the foyer of the court, where you wait for your case to come up, it is always crowded with people. It will mostly be defendants, it will mostly be friends of the defendants who come along to the court to give their support. So everybody is there. It's total chaos. My way of describing it is as a cattle market. In the chaos outside the court you suddenly hear someone call out, 'is Douglas Smith there?' Or, 'is Rebecca So and So there?' This person who is calling out the names will turn out to be the barrister in the case. He doesn't know who he is looking for. He has never seen the person he is looking for before, and the defendant himself or herself doesn't know what he looks like and has never seen him before either.

They finally make contact because the barrister has been around shouting out his name and the defendant hears his name. They both meet.

The first thing the barrister will say to you is, good morning, my name is Mr So and So and your

solicitor has sent me along to present your case in court today'. He'll say, 'don't worry, everything is fine. Just leave everything up to me and we'll do the best we can'.

As a defendant you might say to him, 'well, look, you won't forget to mention the fact that the police did this to me, you won't forget to mention the fact that the police did so and so'. His response will usually be, 'yes, yes, yes, don't worry, just leave it all to me'. To cover himself even further he will say something like, 'between you and me, that magistrate's a real bastard. He doesn't like to be upset. He doesn't like any barrister to get up and attack the police. He doesn't like any barrister to suggest the police are lying or that the police have framed you. So I think the least said about that the better'.

So, on that basis you go into court. Five or ten minutes later the evidence has been presented, the magistrate says 'guilty', and the barrister begins to bargain for as light a sentence as possible, or as light a fine as possible, or as less of a suspended sentence as he can bargain for from the magistrate. Then he comes back to you and says, 'well, it wasn't such a bad result, *we* did the best we can'. That's that. That's the experience that people have everyday in the magistrates court, and that's the attitude the barristers have towards their clients.

DEALING WITH SOLICITORS

Between the time you are arrested and the time you come to court you have to get a solicitor. You have to have a solicitor because a solicitor is the only one who is allowed to prepare your case to present to a barrister. A solicitor is the only one who can fix your court appearance — the date when you are to appear at court. He's the only person who can get important evidence relating to your case. So the function of a solicitor is an important one and it is one that is essential.

What is the reality of the experience that most people have when they actually come to deal with a solicitor? They don't know which solicitor to approach. They hear a name. They arrange on the phone with that solicitor for an appointment. They turn up on the day at the solicitor's office. The solicitor will see him if the defendant is lucky. If not, the person he will usually see at the solicitor's office will be a person called an articulated clerk. An articulated clerk is not a solicitor. It is usually a young man or woman who is training to be a solicitor, but most solicitors like to fob off what they call 'ordinary cases' on articulated

clerks who lack the experience and the expertise to present the cases properly. You go along with the articulated clerk who has to take a statement from you about what happened. He doesn't write down what happened. The normal method in a solicitor's office now is that it is done on a dictaphone machine. You tell him what happened, he repeats what happened into the dictaphone machine, the tape is made and sent up to the secretary and she types it out from the tape. It's called audio typing.

You might say to the articulated clerk, when you come to the particulars of your arrest, that when you were arrested, 'three policemen grabbed me, kicked me in my stomach, wrenched my arm up behind my back etc'. The articulated clerk will respond, 'so would it be right to say that you were roughly treated by the police', and when you say yes, that gets translated on the tape, not as how you described, but as, 'I was roughly treated by the police', which in no way accurately represents the facts of what happened.

At the end of your interview you go away and your case is left in the hands of this firm of solicitors, in

the hands, more particularly, of an inexperienced articulated clerk. When you go away from there you start to remember things that you haven't told him. You start to remember people who were there and names you could give him of people who could be witnesses, who could assist and strengthen your defence. You try to get back in touch with your solicitor. Time and time again you phone up the office and ask to speak to Mr So and So, only to be told that Mr So and So isn't there, or Mr So and So is engaged, and they're not available at the moment. So it's almost impossible, in fact, to get through to your solicitor to tell him important matters concerning your case. What you have to do in the end is to leave a message, and it's an important message, because it concerns your case and you hope that this

message is going to reach the person who is responsible for organising your case. This happens right up to your court appearance.

If you're very lucky you might get another interview with a solicitor. But, by and large, in these offices that handle legal aid cases, you usually get to see the solicitor once only.

You will get a letter, just before you are due to appear in court, saying that you are reminded that your court appearance is going to be on such and such a day, and the solicitor has organised for a barrister to be there, his name is Mr So and So, and he will contact you at the court on the day of your appearance. This is the entire experience from the moment you get arrested, and basically, this is the experience that the BPM and the BSM have rejected.

HOW WE ORGANISE

We are involved at the moment in a number of cases. We are involved in these cases because we believe that there is another way of fighting these cases, that the collaboration that exists between the court, the police, the solicitors and the barristers can be fought. In being involved in these cases, we have had to surface and evolve certain principles of organising around these cases to get the most effective result – the result that we want.

The first principle we have when we become involved in any case is that the defendants themselves have to take control for the organising and preparation of their cases themselves. When a person gets arrested, he can't do that alone, and usually if it's a juvenile or young person his parents will be involved. When we approach cases we want the parents, and the friends of the defendants all to be involved. The first thing we do is to take statements from everybody concerned. We take these statements ourselves. As I've said, normally, the solicitor is the one who will tell you that he is responsible for taking your statement. We say no. We take our own statements, we satisfy ourselves that these statements accurately represent the incident that has just happened. Only when we are entirely satisfied with these statements do we begin to deal with the question of choosing a solicitor.

Our experience is that there is no such thing as a good solicitor. Not anywhere is there such a thing as a good solicitor. The attitude of a solicitor is that he is the professional, he is the expert and he knows best, much better than you, how to organise your case. In fact, as far as he is concerned, the less you become involved the better for him. He will want to organise your case as though you don't exist. The moment we begin to present that we know best about our own cases, that we know best ourselves what happened, we know best ourselves how to write down that experience, we know best ourselves who the witnesses are and we begin to tell him so, he feels threatened. As I have said, a solicitor is essential in court cases, so while we in the BPM and BSM are putting our energies into dealing with the preparation ourselves, we are having at the same time to deal with solicitors who resent what we are doing, who resent the challenge to their authority as being the experts,

who resent the challenge to their function. So they will try in all kinds of ways to undermine our organisation.

So, not only do we have to fight the case the police have got us into, we're also having to fight solicitors who try in all ways and means to undermine what we are doing.

I'll give you a few examples of this. A solicitor won't say to you directly that he will not take your instructions, because that is the service that a solicitor is supposed to provide, and it is the service for which he is paid. He won't say he won't take your instructions. What he will do is prevaricate, and make it very difficult, and in some cases ignore what your instructions are. Now, in the case of the four people who were arrested in Oxford Street, for example, in that case, we instructed the solicitors involved to organise for a particular barrister in whom we have confidence, because he's been tried and tested in other cases and we have confidence in him. We instructed the solicitor to make sure and get that barrister for that court appearance. When the case came to court, and the parents and defendants arrived at court, a completely different barrister was there. Not the one that we'd asked for, somebody else whom we didn't know, whom we'd never heard of. The excuse of the solicitor was that at the last moment he discovered that the barrister we wanted was on holiday, and he didn't tell us this. We had no knowledge of this and therefore no chance to turn round and have a rethink on who we wanted, and to get somebody else that we wanted.

The solicitor present at a meeting of defendants in a recent case was informed that the defendants wanted a particular barrister. His immediate response was, 'well, I've never heard of this woman, never heard of her, I don't know what her work's like and I myself will have to check this out'. Now this had the effect of undermining the confidence of the girls, the defendants themselves.

The way he [this solicitor] wanted to present the case in court was to separate those girls who have no records, no previous convictions, from those girls who have a lot of convictions, because he said that the magistrate will be much more sympathetic to those

girls with no previous convictions. Therefore the barristers of those girls with no previous convictions would be the ones who would do most of the talking, and all those girls who have got previous convictions would keep their mouths shut and not say anything. After he left we discussed this and its implications, that, in fact, this kind of defensive strategy that the solicitor was proposing really weakened and undermined our whole case. And as it turned out we rejec-

ted that, but what he began to do, just by his very presence, was to undermine our own organisation on the basis that he himself was the expert and that he himself knows best.

What I am saying is that we begin by involving defendants and parents; we take our own statements and we hold regular meetings around the cases from every stage right up until the case comes to court.

MOBILISE THE COMMUNITY

The other aspect of case organisation that we believe is absolutely necessary is the mobilisation of the community in which we live – to inform them of what is happening, of what we are doing, in order to combat what is happening. One of the first things that we do, as we have done in the case of the Wood Green 18, as we have done in Harlesden, as we did in the case of Cliff McDaniel, as we did with four black schoolgirls who had been arrested by the police in a school in Hackney, also last year, is to produce a leaflet, and these leaflets are very important because what we hope to do in these leaflets is to present the case of the defendants themselves so that the defendants are allowed to tell the story of what

happened themselves. We know that we can't rely on the newspapers to do this for us, and that whatever we read in the newspapers about the incident is a total distortion of what happened. So, it is important that other members of the community, who have to rely on newspapers as their only source of information, can rely on another source of information, and that is our leaflet.

We also organise meetings like this one this afternoon so that we can say what we are doing to other members of the community, so that other parents can speak about what their experiences have been, and so that the defendants themselves can also talk about what their experiences have been.



FILE A COMPLAINT

We also write letters of complaint. We write to the Home Secretary, because the Home Secretary is the person who is responsible for the police. He is responsible for their recruitment and he is responsible for their actions. We also write a letter of complaint to the Commissioner of Police who is, at the moment, Sir Robert Mark, and in the case of students, in the cases we have been involved in where school students are involved, we write letters to the Education Authority about how the police have conducted themselves, how the police are continually in the schools and around the schools harassing black students, and we want the Education Authority, who is the responsible body in the area, to take some kind of action on what is happening.

Another thing that I want to say something about is what happens when a complaint is made to the police. Whenever a complaint is made, the police have to follow up that complaint. They have to come around and they have to interview people and their witnesses who are making that complaint. This always happens after the case has come to court, never before, and never during. An inspector and someone else, usually a sergeant or other low ranking officer, are usually deputised by the Commissioner of Police to investigate the complaint. Now, the main thrust of the police, when they are carrying out in-

vestigations into these complaints, will be to persuade you to drop your complaint. In the past, the police have usually been very successful in doing this. They have been successful because they arrive at your house when you are alone, they see you on your own, they intimidate you on your own, so that you end up saying, 'alright I won't go through with it', and you drop your complaint.

We had an experience in the BPM in the case of S. We complained to the police about his arrest, the manner in which he was arrested, the beating that he received at the hands of the police at the point of arrest, which continued inside the police station itself. Because we had taken control over the organisation of that case, by the time it came to dealing with the police complaint, we were used to the kind of trickery that different state agencies use to undermine your case. So the same principle we used for the organisation of the case we applied to the police investigation.

We made an appointment with the inspector who was the officer in charge of carrying out the investigations. We made our own appointment with the inspector who had to turn up at our convenience to investigate, to talk to the witnesses concerned and to the complainant himself. The inspector turned up with his lower ranking officer half an hour earlier





than the appointed time. Fortunately, we had anticipated this, and we ourselves said that we would meet half an hour earlier because you know how tricky these people can be, and we were right, because half an hour before the time the inspector put in his appearance. That was the first thing.

At that meeting, there were the complainant, his parents and those of his friends who had been there at the time and witnessed the beating he had received and had witnessed his arrest, who were all part, an important part, of supporting the complaint. Before we met the inspector, we organised our own statements concerning the complaint and we made sure that the inspector was in possession of all the statements.

Well, all of us were there that evening, and the second thing that the inspector tried to do was to get us all out of the room under the guise that our presence was non-productive, and that he really couldn't carry out an investigation with all of these people in the room. The complainant said that he wanted us to be in the room, we were there at his invitation, his parents agreed that they wanted us in the room, the witnesses concerned also agreed that they wanted us in the room. So, the inspector couldn't force that one and he was defeated again.

The next thing inspector tried to do was to say, 'oh, unfortunately, I have made a terrible mistake and I have left all the statements that you gave me behind, I have come here without the statements'. We said,

'OK, fine, we will do some more statements now'. He sat there, him and his sergeant, and he had to interview everybody concerned, and he had to take the statements from them. That having been done, he started to pack them up. 'OK, well, I will be in touch with you when I have had a chance to go through these.' We said, 'no, we want those statements, they are our statements and our solicitors have a right to look at those statements, and when we are satisfied with them, we will let you have them back, we will let you have copies'. 'Oh that is all right', he says, 'I can make copies and send you copies'. We said it was no trouble for us at all to make copies and let him have them. So that on everything with the inspector, the usual trickery that they try to use with people when they are on their own was no longer effective, and the whole complaints procedure had to go. It was under our control instead of his control, as so often in our cases it usually is.

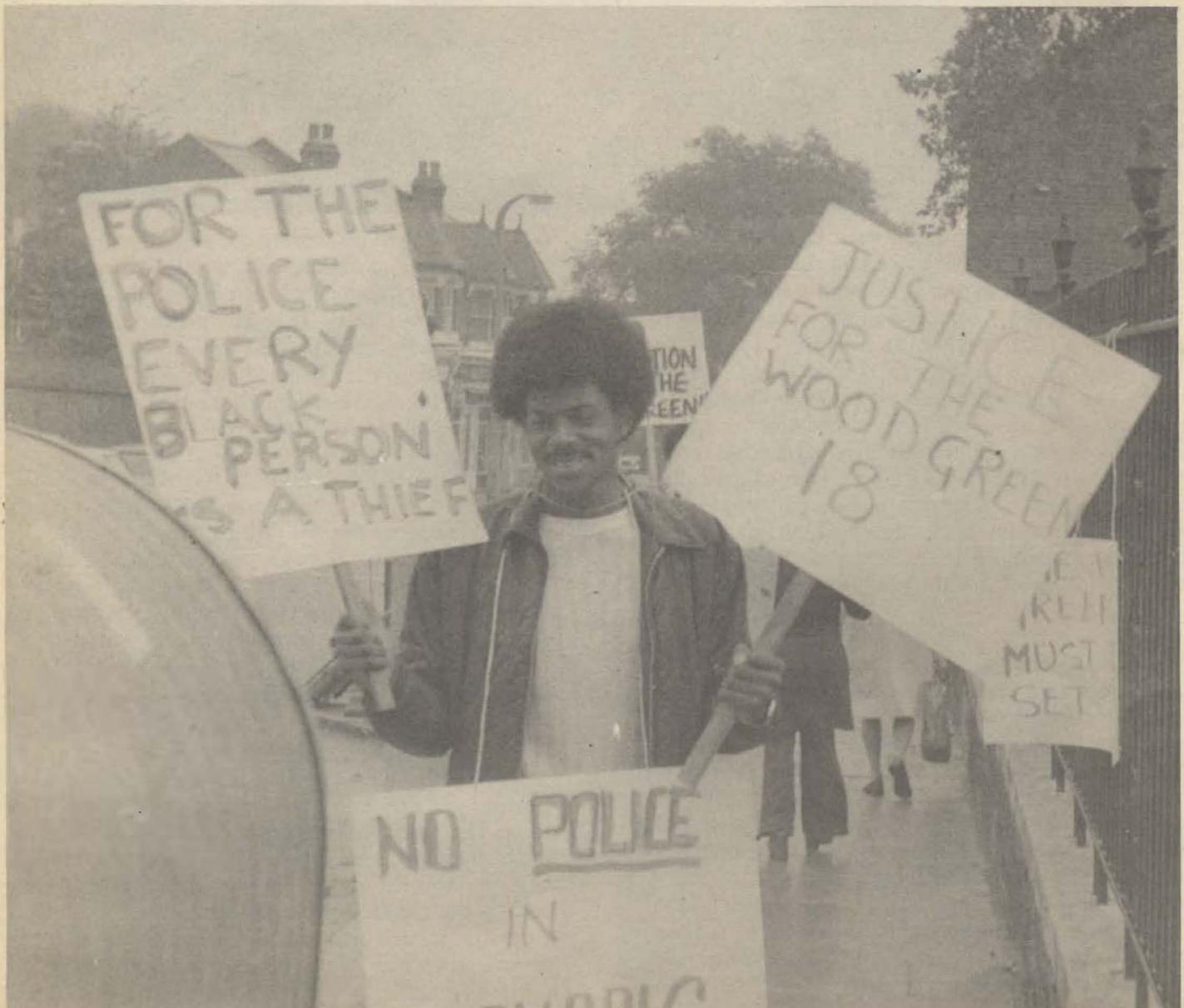
The kinds of experiences that we ourselves in the Black Parents Movement have come up against in organising ourselves, these experiences reproduce themselves over and over again, and it is only by taking these cases under our own control, by constant vigilance over the activity of barristers, over the activity of solicitors can we even begin to effectively deal with what we are up against. And that really is the purpose as to why the BPM organises in the way that it does organise.

THE GROWTH OF A MOVEMENT

The methods we have been using and the importance of it should become absolutely clear as we go along. In the last year, in addition to the central experience which brought the organisation into existence, we have had all these other experiences with other black youth, either those we live with, those we are related to, those we meet, who are harassed by the police, who are arrested by the police. Police violence is the constant experience of the black community in Britain. The youth have it, the older working class have it.

Everybody has it on an everyday basis in the black community. It is one of the important sources of oppression of the black community in Britain at the present moment. But what is interesting is, that

when, about six months after we had been doing work in the BSM and the BPM, the police broke into a house, two members were able to take information as to who the police were, a complete record as to what the police had done, so that they could confront the police as to what was taking place. So, it was because of the experience they had had of the work of the BSM, that they had the confidence to do that and the ability to do that as well. And finally, we have to say that it is the black students who became involved in the Wood Green case before the black parents. It was S, it was T, it was V from the BSM who knew the people involved who took their own statements. Thorough, well prepared statements, on the basis of the experience we had had of working together — par-



ents and youths and students — in the last year. It is important to say that because the other section of the youth who are now working with us will become involved and they will learn, and they will be able to organise in the future to deal with police violence, to deal with police oppression.

It is a self confidence in the capacity of the youth to deal with the State and the most coercive section of the state machinery, the police. The most violent section of the coercive state machinery you have to deal with and that experience is important for us to understand.

One other point we wish to make. It is in connection with the black youth and the police and the experience in the courts which we have learnt ourselves from these cases. Frequently, what appears

to be the irresponsibility or the negligence of the black youth in these cases, hasn't got anything to do with either irresponsibility or negligence, but has to do with a deeply held view of the courts, of the schools, of the magistrates, of the judges. Because, on the whole, their political judgement is accurate. That you don't get justice from the courts, you won't get justice from the magistrates courts, you won't get justice from the high courts. So where the black community appears to be negligent, irresponsible, or not to care, as some parents say about the youth, it is because they recognise what the court is about, they recognise what the schools are about, they recognise what the judges are about, and they believe that there is nothing to counter that.

NEW POLICE METHODS



What we have got to work together in discovering is our strength in dealing with these institutions. It is this policy which the last speaker has outlined which gives you some idea of the methods which we have been using to involve the defendants themselves, with their parents, with the organisation. The amount of statements we now have tells us the various strategies the police are using. For example, it should now be fairly clear that the police are not using the charges of riot and affray anymore. Take the Wood Green case. When we went to court on the last occasion in June, the police prosecutor said that the papers were with the Director of Public Prosecutions. We knew what that meant. We have outlined how the charges of affray are brought. All you have to get are a few people to say that they were threatened, and the police know how to get these statements and the police pass these statements to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Once those statements are in his hands, he usually brings charges of affray because of threatening conduct to the fear of the citizens. It is an old tactic that the police have been using. But the police have been losing affray charges whenever these have been taken to the higher courts. From 1970 in

the Mangrove trial, every major case of affray, including the Cricklewood case, the Bonfire case in Leeds, the police have lost those cases.

What they have done so far is to increase the original charges. One of the defendants who is here faces another charge of assaulting the police, with two others they put on two more charges of assaulting the police. Because in putting those charges they leave the case in the magistrates courts — the police courts — where they are more likely to obtain convictions. Most of the convictions that the black youths have, they receive at the hands of those magistrates. In the case of S we not only raised the issue with the Lord Chancellor, we raised the point that we were dissatisfied with the magistrates themselves and we will continue to raise that point in the future because we have said over and over, and I want to repeat, it is not just a question of justice when you go to that court. It is a question of police interests and our interests in the court. The magistrates are rubber stamps for the police, and each day of the experience of the black youth in the courts, of the older working class in the courts, confirms us in that experience — that the magistrates court are a rubber stamp for the police.