

Councillor Bernie Grant's speech to a special meeting of Haringey Council on Monday October 14 concerning the disturbances at Broadwater Farm on October 6 1985.

The following motion was tabled in the name of Councillor Grant. It was passed 35 in favour, 16 against, 3 not voting.

"Haringey Council deeply regrets the deaths of Mrs Cynthia Jarrett and PC Blakelock and sends its fullest condolences to their families in their tragic loss. The Council also extends sympathy to all those injured in the weekend's disturbances.

These events underline this Council's belief that violence is unacceptable, whether it occurs through police insensitivity, Government indifference, or public disorder. The callous treatment of Mrs Jarrett and the killing of PC Blakelock are both inexcusable acts.

This Council recognises the wish of the people we represent to live free of fear. It believes that petrol bombing, shooting and stone throwing are no answer to the legitimate grievances of black and white people in Tottenham. The only solution is a political one – to end this Government's policies of misery at the next General Election by replacing it with a Labour Government.

This Council recognises that the trigger for the events was insensitive and racist policing. In particular:

- the use of the powers of stop and search in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which the Council is on record as opposing;
- the circumstances surrounding the arrest of Floyd Jarrett and the subsequent intrusion into the home of Mrs Jarrett which lead to her death;
- the action of the police on Sunday evening (October 6th) in laying an unnecessary cordon around the Broadwater Farm estate.

This Council therefore demands: –

- an immediate return to an acceptable and normal level of policing on Broadwater Farm estate;
- a fully independent public inquiry into the death of Mrs Jarrett and subsequent events and into the breakdown in police/community relations in Tottenham;
- the suspension, in the meantime, of the officers both concerned in, and responsible for, the raid on Mrs Jarrett's home;
- full compensation from the Government, for all residents suffering losses;
- an assurance that CS gas and plastic bullets will never be used by the police;
- an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary and shadow Home Secretary to pursue these demands.

Failing adequate Government response, the Council will: –

- set up its own independent public inquiry;
- discuss with the residents affected, how the Council can best assist in pursuing their legitimate demands for compensation.

This Council is concerned about the hopelessness and despair which prevail among the youth of the borough. This is caused by the withdrawal of Government funds to the borough together with other Government economic and social policies.

We, therefore, call on the Secretary of State for the Environment and shadow Secretary of State to visit Tottenham in order to view the effects in the area of Government policies, including the withdrawal of rate support grant, cuts in housing capital allocations and the refusal of Programme Status under the Urban Programme.

The Council congratulates employees of all its services whose prompt action restored normal service so quickly to Broadwater Farm estate and the surrounding area.

Finally, this Council condemns the biased press coverage of recent events and the emotive and racist reactions expressed by speakers at last week's Conservative Party conference. This has hindered the Council and the local community in their efforts to achieve our joint aims of a return to normality and an end to violence.

We resolve to use all means, including a special issue of the Haringey Star, in order to ensure that the Council's stance is clearly understood and that the process of reconciliation is enhanced."

Speaking to the motion Councillor Grant said:

"The whole Council has already expressed its deepest regret at the deaths of Mrs Cynthia Jarrett and PC Keith Blakelock. We wrote immediately to convey our condolences to both families, and we have just stood silently in memory of both the deceased.

Mrs Jarrett leaves five children and nine grandchildren. PC Blakelock leaves a wife and three sons. They have to face these tragic losses for the rest of their lives. They have my wholehearted personal sympathy.

In the community, the pressing need now is for reconciliation. I will come to that shortly. But first I want to ask: why did it happen?

In our motion we refer to the hopelessness and despair of the young people of Tottenham. I want the Council to stop and think what we mean by that.

In the Tottenham parliamentary constituency, in September 1985, 10,168 people were registered unemployed. At the Tottenham Job Centre there were three registered vacancies. Let me say that again. There were **THREE** registered job vacancies.

To put it another way, one man in four in Tottenham's labour force, and one woman in seven, is unemployed.

These are figures for the constituency as a whole. For young people, the situation is far, far worse. We estimate that some 60 per cent of the young people of Broadwater Farm are unemployed. And no one can doubt that, if we had the statistics, the figures for black young people would be higher still.

Comrade Mayor, we are talking about a situation where the routine experience of young black people, leaving school in Tottenham, is to have no job to go to and no prospect of a job. And therefore no money, because of the pitiful inadequacy of the state benefit system – even before the further cuts contemplated by the Fowler Reviews. And therefore no access to the goods and services and styles of life which many of us on the Council take for granted.

I ask all Members, and particularly the Members representing the wealthier western parts of the Borough: try for a moment to put yourselves in the position of those young black people.

But economic deprivation has been with us for years, and extends far beyond Broadwater Farm Estate. Yet it rarely leads to a revolt of the kind we saw on Broadwater Farm. Something else is needed to trigger such an angry reaction.

That 'something else' is oppressive policing. Policing which is totally insensitive to the needs of an area like Tottenham. Policing which, to many local people, seems to have more to do with containing their grievances than protecting their interest. Policing which is frankly racist.

Don't take my word for it. Cast your minds back to last year's Policy Studies Institute report on the Metropolitan Police – commissioned by the police themselves. Researchers who spent two years working with the police found that, and I quote:

"Racist language and racial prejudice were prominent and pervasive... racist talk and racial prejudice are... on the whole expected, accepted and even fashionable... we cannot produce examples of police officers objecting to racist language or arguing with others who express racist views."

They found that the police make a crude equation between blacks and crime; and that black people are more likely than whites to be the victims of indiscriminate stop-and-search procedures. These factors were of major importance in the build-up of tension on Broadwater Farm in recent weeks. They were at the heart of the sequence of events – the stopping of Floyd Jarrett, the invasion of Mrs Jarrett's home – which led to the weekend's disturbances.

Over the last week I have given literally dozens of press and media interviews – and I have been sharply criticized for some of my remarks. As a black Council leader in an area affected by the disturbances, I have been in a unique position – and my responses have been emotional as well as political. I know that some things could have been better said. But I have told the truth – a point I will come back to later. And I insist on the importance of what I have been trying to say. I have been trying to articulate the perceptions of those young black people who *do* see the police as their enemy. I have been arguing that theirs is an authentic social response – not a product of original sin or mythical outside agitators. It is one voice in our community, and if we try to suppress it, or pretend it is not there, we will make the situation worse.

The need now is to embark on a process of reconciliation. The Council itself has a major responsibility here. But many others have a part to play, and I want first to address my remarks to them.

First, the Government – from whom we seek several responses:

- We demand that they set up a fully independent public inquiry into the death of Mrs Jarrett and the subsequent events. The community will not have confidence in the outcome of the inquiry which the police themselves are now conducting.

- We call for full financial compensation for all residents who suffered losses.

- We want the Home Secretary to meet us urgently to discuss the crisis of confidence in Tottenham policing.

- We want the Secretary of State for the Environment to come to Tottenham and see for himself what the Government's economic and social policies are doing to the area. We want the burden of Government spending cuts lifted from the Borough. We want to be freed from the treadmill of cuts in Rate Support Grant and the high rates that result. We want a start made on implementing the modest proposals of the Scarman report.

Next I want to say something to the police themselves. We have some immediate demands, arising directly from recent events. We call for:

- The suspension of all those officers concerned in the raid on Mrs Jarrett's home.

- An assurance that CS gas and plastic bullets – thankfully not used at Broadwater Farm – will **never** be used.

But the issues go much wider. I call on the police to show some respect for the young people of Haringey. Two people have died in the chain of events which started on Saturday 5 October. That is enough. There must be a rethink of how Tottenham is policed and the Council is prepared to play a full part in that.

It is no secret that Members on this side at first considered more drastic action to convey to the police our sense of outrage. We did agree that we could only pay the police precept, when it next falls due, if certain conditions were met. I have received a direct appeal from the Leader of the Labour Party, Comrade Neil Kinnock, to step back from this threat. The Labour Group has agreed to do so, to avoid any further polarisation. We ask the police to show the same willingness to rethink their own position.

Next I want to speak to the young people of Tottenham. I said earlier that I had spoken the truth last week about their situation and their attitudes. Now I want to speak my mind to them.

I want to say that some things are wrong. Drug-trafficking is wrong. Thieving is wrong. Attacks on old people are wrong. Many of them have spent a lifetime fighting oppression also.

And I want to say to the young people: violence offers no solution to your problems. You can't fight hatred with hatred. You can't fight fear with fear. You can't fight violence with violence. The State's response will always escalate. Next time, rubber bullets and CS gas will be used. The time after that, the Army will be brought in.

The only way forward is through political action. I believe that the line I have taken over the last week has opened up at least the possibility of drawing young people into a dialogue about peaceful political solutions to your problems. If we could achieve that, it would be a great step forward. So I appeal to you: step back from the violence and allow the Council to speak for you.

I also want to say something to the Borough's employers. Strangely enough, I can't do better than to quote the editorial in Friday's 'Hornsey Journal':

"Hands up every employer who has said: I won't employ blacks – they're lazy."

The Council has been making major efforts to live up to its claim to be an 'equal opportunity employer'. We still have a very long way to go. But I ask the Borough's other employers: please join our efforts.

Next, I want to say some words to the press. There are more of you here tonight than is usual when we debate Haringey's pressing problems. You have it in your power to shape people's perceptions of the current crisis. You can trivialise, you can personalise, you can distort – you can inflame the situation, or you can cool it down. We appeal to you to help us to cool it.

Finally, I turn to what the Council itself can do.

First of all, we can clear up the mess. Our employees have already responded magnificently to the emergency at Broadwater Farm, and I hope every Member of the Council will join me in thanking them all for that. We will also meet the residents affected to see how the Council can help them to pursue their claims for compensation.

Secondly, we have a responsibility as the Borough's elected representatives to tackle the crisis of policing in Tottenham. If the Government refuses to do so, this Council will establish its own independent inquiry into the recent events, and the wider breakdown in police/community relations which they represent. We know that many sections of the community live in fear, and need the protection of a responsive and responsible police force. We believe this can only be achieved by making the management of the police accountable to elected Members.

Thirdly, we have to give a new priority to the needs of the Borough's young people. Within the Education Service, youth provision has been the Cinderella for too long. We will continue to fight for jobs for young people, and we are looking very very seriously at the establishment of a full Youth Committee of the Council to give a new priority to services for young people.

Last, but not least, we need to rebuild a future for Broadwater Farm. The Youth Association, the Tenant's Association and the Council have made great strides in bringing confidence and sense of community to the estate. Obviously, the recent events are a major setback. The Council must respond with new initiatives. We need the ideas of all the estate's tenants on how to make it a safe and happy environment; and how to improve the social and recreational facilities for all sections of the community. And then we must find, or fight for, the resources to make these ideas a reality.

Comrade Mayor, I have spoken long enough. I end on this note. The events of Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th October have happened. They cannot be wished away. They are a reality which we have to tackle.

The Council will redouble its efforts to overcome the economic and social deprivation of Tottenham, and the disadvantage and racism which its black residents face. We want to ensure that *all* the people of Haringey, black and white, young and old, can go about their lives free of the fear of violence. I include in that the violence of unemployment, the violence of poor housing, the violence of poverty. We believe we have a right to insist that the Government stops attacking us and starts to help us."