



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

TOTTENHAM LABOUR PARTY

MP's REPORT OCTOBER 1993

Thanks to all of those who wrote saying that you liked the Day By Day account of my work I used in my July report. Many of you said it was the first time they had understood what an MP's routine is actually like, and were impressed as to the scope of the work that comes my way. I certainly plan to use this format again in the future from time to time.

GENERAL MATTERS

FUTURE OF BLACK PEOPLE IN BRITAIN

As most of you will be aware, I have been at the centre of controversy in recent weeks about remarks I was alleged to have made advocating voluntary repatriation for black people. I am going to take some space in this report to tell you what I actually said, explain why I said it, and to deal with some of the reactions that there have been.

The occasion was a small fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton, called by the Labour Race Action Group, and hosted by my colleague Keith Vaz MP. Its purpose was to discuss the state of race relations in Britain on the 25th Anniversary of Enoch Powell's 1968 "rivers of blood" speech. I went along to the meeting to be part of the audience, but when neither Bill Morris or Diane Abbott turned up to speak as scheduled, Keith asked me if I would fill in. There were no more than 30 people in attendance, but the occasion was filmed by a Central Television crew, and journalists

from the Evening Standard, Caribbean Times, The Voice and elsewhere were present. Herman Ousely, the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality was the only other speaker.

I made a ten minute speech, in which I spoke of the deteriorating state of race relations in Britain, and of the failure of the major political parties to address the issue. I spoke of the desperation of many people in the black community, the increasing unease which was being reported to me by many Constituents, and also about the idea of Reparations for black countries as compensation for colonisation, and enslavement.

The meeting passed off smoothly, and clearly none of the press and media present thought that I had said anything exceptional, since nothing was reported in the subsequent week. The only press coverage of the meeting was about some remarks that Herman Ousely had made about the Joy Gardner case.

I was approached a couple of days later however by the reporter from the Voice who had attended the meeting, and he seemed somewhat confused by what I had said. I agreed with him that I would give him a full interview when we got back to London expanding on what I had said at the meeting. He agreed that he would not publish anything on the subject until this had happened, and that I would approve the final version before it was printed.

I now know that this reporter recorded my speech. I give literally hundreds of speeches every year, and initially had no clear recollec-

tion of the precise words that I had used. One thing I was sure about however is that I had not advocated voluntary repatriation, and the tape shows this.

This is what I actually said :

" I can tell you that people are coming to me saying that they want voluntary repatriation, that we have had enough of this lousy country. Black people of African descent, are coming to my surgery saying it's time we left this blooming place, and it's time we were repatriated voluntarily. So this is what people are saying to me, and it's something I have to consider, and I haven't come down on one side or the other "

" People are saying to me, Bernie Grant you are our MP you go and negotiate with John Major, John Smith and Paddy Ashdown, for them to give back the money they stole from Africa, the Caribbean, and all over the world, and then we will go back voluntarily, and we won't have to wait for the BNP to be elected to send us back - we'll go back voluntarily."

The following Tuesday, the enclosed article appeared on the front page of the Voice, with the sensational headline "Take the Money and Run" (an emotive phrase I never used.) I was extremely angry that the Voice reporter had renegeged on our agreement. Given the immediate press interest, I called a press conference at the House of Commons the same afternoon to clarify what I had said.

I have the text of what I said at that press conference. I made it quite clear that I did not advocate

voluntary repatriation. I said that it was a fact that some black people were already choosing that option, and that there were others who would like to, but were prohibited from doing so because of lack of resources. I went on to explain the more profound notion of Reparations for Africa, and the growing demand for there to be compensation for black countries. I said that in that context, there would be some black people who would be attracted by the prospect of going to live and work in those countries to help to develop them, as part of a supported programme financed by Western Countries who had been enriched by slavery and colonisation.

I stated that this was part of a long term campaign, and part of the black agenda for the future which black people must now debate. I said it was not an option for most black people and that the fight against racism in Britain had to continue.

The reporting of what I said was on the whole pretty disgraceful, most papers choosing to take my ideas about Reparations and the long term future as part of an immediate prescription for the present. "Pay Blacks to Go Home" was the typical headline. Many of them continued to insist that I was calling for "voluntary repatriation". Sadly, the bulk of this misleading coverage came out on the same day as many Wards met, and I am aware that some have passed Motions based on these reports.

If the newspapers were deplorable, then so too were the responses of some anti-racist groups, and indeed my fellow MPs. Without doing me the courtesy of asking me exactly what I had said they rushed to the press to condemn what I was supposed to have said. The Anti-Racist Alliance, for instance, turned up at my press conference, and handed out a condemnatory press statement to the assembled press before I had even spoken. Paul Boateng was secured by the Labour Party Press Office to take to the airwaves in the most vitriolic and abusive terms imaginable. Common manners might have led him

to telephone me before jumping to conclusions.

Since then, I have done everything possible to get across to people what I am really saying, by means of writing articles and letters for the press, by giving interviews to local, national and international media, and by talking at numerous meetings. The Voice newspaper has happily agreed to sponsor a conference on the whole question of Reparations, and I have accepted a number of further speaking engagements for the coming month.

I also called a meeting with statutory officers of Tottenham CLP, which proved useful.

Now, I am more than ready to defend what I have said, but not to defend what I have not said. If people want to attack me for what they think I have said then that is up to them.

What I will not accept however is that I should not speak out on behalf of my Constituents. I have had numerous black Constituents come to me to find out if they can get help to go back home, and I have both a right and a duty to speak for them. Since this controversy arose I have had a stream of people at my surgery, and my postbag has been full of letters from black people all over the country who would like to have the opportunity of going back home. This is a terrible indictment on British society, and those who think that I should not talk about this, should perhaps ask themselves why they would rather the matter was hushed up. Does it make them feel uncomfortable or guilty perhaps?

Or perhaps they are saying that the people who come to me should not be allowed to go if they want to? Do they think that people who are suffering from poverty and racism day in and day out, that feel they can no longer tolerate this society, should be obliged to stay here for the sake of political correctness? This sounds like a kind of fascism of the left to me.

Others have said that in daring to

talk about this issue, I am pandering to racists and fascists. What I am saying however is far from what the racists and fascists are saying. I am saying that black people have every right to be here - they say we have not, and that we should "go back where we came from." I am saying that there are some black people who simply do not want to exercise their right to be here, and that this is something that we have to confront as a society. To the racists, the very idea of black people having a choice is anathema, and their silence in this whole debate is, I believe evidence of their confusion.

There have been others however, who whilst they agree with what I am saying, believe that I should not have raised the issue at this particular time when racist attacks and murders are on the increase, and when the BNP has just won a council election. This I do not accept. How long must I wait to talk about the need for a debate about the future for black people in this country? Do I wait two months, two years, five years? By then we shall probably have had more racist murders, and more BNP councillors, and be no further forward unless such a debate takes place. The deterioration in the situation makes the debate more urgent, and if I say nothing, then this amounts to allowing the fascists to set the agenda once again.

I don't want anyone coming to me in five years time, and saying that I failed to foresee what was happening, and did nothing to defend my Constituents. People should remember that the chattering classes in Nazi Germany sat back and allowed Hitler to develop his racist ideology. By the time they woke up it was too late.

Already the publicity which this issue has generated, has raised a debate which we have needed to have in this country for many years, frankly and openly. There can be no virtue in the sufferings and alienation of a substantial section of society being hidden from public view. That is the way to heighten tension and to create serious social disintegration. Perversely perhaps,

my remarks have already led some of our most racist newspapers, such as the Sun and the Mail, to come out clearly in their Editorials and say that black people belong in Britain and have every right to be here. If that is not wrong-footing the fascists then I don't know what is! It is these newspapers that have provided much of the impetus for racists and fascists in this country, and if they are changing their tune then that is a major achievement.

However unintentionally, I believe that as a result of what I have said, there is now a huge debate raging within the black community itself about our future. I want to emphasise that I am talking here about black people of African descent. As I have said repeatedly since this whole issue emerged, it is time that the black community had its own agenda, and stopped simply reacting to that set by fascists and racists. Some of the fiercest criticism that I have had it from those, often prominent, anti-racist campaigners, especially the Anti-Racist Alliance, who are so locked into this reactive and defensive approach, that they have little vision of an alternative agenda.

Some of you may have seen the BBC Newsnight item, which I think confirms what I am saying here. There is a huge gap between what self styled black leaders are saying and doing, and what those on the street are saying. If what I have said, or didn't say, has started that debate, then I am happy.

What I am even happier about is the attention which has been drawn to the reparations issue, as a result of all this. I could have campaigned for the next five years and not got anything like the coverage on the issue. Regular readers will know that this is something which I have been involved in for some time. It is an argument which is well understood in the USA and elsewhere, but a relatively new one here - hence the controversy. I have spoken at several large meetings since this controversy arose, both locally and elsewhere, and there is has been huge interest and support, and I believe that it is an issue which will form the basis for

a new agenda for black people in the coming years.

As for the Labour Party, I remain concerned about its silence on the matters of race. Whilst Major and Ashdown have made statements following the BNP victory in East London, John Smith has said very little. I shall be having a meeting with our Front Bench Spokesperson shortly, and I shall be expressing my fears that Labour is in danger of being left behind in the matter.

My only regret about the way in which this debate has emerged is that I would have preferred it to have taken place amongst the wider black community in the first place. However, this did not happen, and it is now a debate which all on the left must now engage in. White socialists now have to come to terms with the alienation of many in the black community, and to work out what they are going to do about it.

THE KILLING OF JOY GARDNER

Joy's death came at the start of the summer, and thus I have yet to report to the Party about the matter. I assume however that most members will now be familiar with the sad facts of what happened on the morning of the 28th July at her home in Crouch End.

The issues which arose from Joy's death dominated the summer for me and the staff in my office. We had known Joy since she first came to me in 1990, for help with her housing and immigration problems, and we were all shocked that anyone could meet such a terrible death in our own borough.

Her death revealed the existence of Scotland Yard's deportation squad, and still more about the methods now being used to remove people from this country. In some ways, this was something which was waiting to happen. With many MPs I had expressed concern for some time about the secrecy surrounding the work of the immigration service, and what I believe will come out at the end of the day is the

utter lack of accountability of these people for the decisions they make and the way that they implement them.

As an MP who deals with immigration cases daily, I have always been concerned about the utter lack of fairness with which they operate, and the huge degree of discretion they are afforded. Of late however, the quality of the decision making has become more and more questionable, and the attitudes of Immigration Officers towards those they deal with is at times nothing short of downright racist and inhuman.

The key culprits in all this however are Government Ministers, who over the past year have been sitting down with their European counterparts, in secret, to find new ways of expelling people from Europe, and new ways of restricting people from coming here in the first place. Given the kinds of Government pronouncements we have had in recent months, it is not at all surprising that Immigration Officers feel free to behave as they do. They know that when push comes to a shove, they have political endorsement at the highest level for what they do.

The only difference between Joy's case and others is that they went too far, and she died. There are many others who have been the subject to similarly unfair decisions, and disgraceful physical coercion. We now know that private security firms are being hired to do some of the dirty work, and that they are totally unregulated and untrained in the kind of work they are being contracted for.

Our demand immediately after Joy's death was for a full public enquiry into what happened, and that demand remains the same. There are presently three enquiries going on - an internal one by the police themselves, and internal Home office enquiry, and that being conducted by the Police Complaints Authority. None of these however will provide the in depth, public investigation of the Immigration Service, and immigration policy which is really needed.

The PCA enquiry has still not been

completed, and we now expect it to report in the first week of November. It is hoped that the report when it appears will make recommendations as regards disciplinary proceedings against the officers involved in her death, as well as their superiors. We hope too that it will make recommendations to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who will then decide whether criminal charges should be brought against the officers.

The PCA has the power also to make a report to the Secretary of State, if it believes that there are matters of serious public concern arising from a complaint. The Secretary of State is then obliged to make this report available to the House. We believe that this will be done in this case, which will enable MPs to debate the matter in Parliament.

The Joy Gardner Campaign was set up immediately after her death, and has proved highly successful. It has organised a number of events, and more are planned for the future. It has worked closely with Joy's family from the outset, is non-sectarian in nature, and open to anyone who wants to expose the truth about what happened to Joy, and to prevent it happening to anyone else in the future. It normally meets at the African-Caribbean Centre every Thursday evening at 7.30pm, and all are welcome. An Information Bulletin, badges, and other campaigning material are all available from my office.

The Joy Gardner Fund was launched immediately after Joy's death, and to date some £8,000 has been raised. The money will be used to meet the immediate and longer term needs of Joy's family, not least her 6 year old son Graeme, to meet funeral costs, and for the campaign. Some Wards have already donated very generously, but all contributions will still be gratefully received. Cheques should be made payable to the Joy Gardner Fund, c/o 3 Devonshire Chambers, 577 High Road, Tottenham, London, N17 6SB.

PARLIAMENT RETURNS

The House returned only last week, for what looks as though it is going to be a fairly patchy session. It rises again on in early November, and returns for the Queen's Speech on 18th November, and the Budget Day is 30th November.

For the Tories it will be sticky session, and they face possible rebellions on both Rail Privatisation and Vat on fuel. They have had a disastrous summer, as blunder after blunder weakened Major's leadership still further. He has reached rock bottom in the opinion polls of course, and more importantly continues to be derided by many of his own MPs.

Of course there was a massive effort to coincide with Tory party Conference to rehabilitate him - even Teresa Gorman was saying nice things about him - but this is only skin deep. Without naming names, I had the opportunity of speaking to a number of Tory MPs in some depth over the summer (not something I usually do!), and there is little doubt that Major is presiding over a very divided party indeed, and may not be in post for that much longer. The hunt is still on for his successor, make no bones about it.

PARLIAMENTARY LABOUR PARTY

Following our own Party Conference, and with OMOV now out of the way, we have returned this week to the Shadow Cabinet elections. There has of course been controversy over the wisdom of the new rule that MPs are obliged to vote for a minimum of four women in the ballot, since the effect of this has been to reduce the number of women elected rather than the reverse. Recriminations are rife about this, and it is hard to know whether this has been the result of conspiracy or a cock-up really. I certainly don't know of anyone who deliberately used wrecking tactics, although I would deplore it if they did. I think that we should

maintain the rule, and take the top four women as elected.

CONSTITUENCY MATTERS

1. ASSISTED AREA STATUS

The announcement on this was finally made in July, and happily High Cross and Coleraine were included as part of the successful Lea Valley bid. With the Council, I was most unhappy that South Tottenham was not included, and arranged a meeting with them Minister to press the point. We were told however that South Tottenham did not meet the criteria on land availability to be included.

Tory Enfield had seven wards in all allowed, and Waltham Forest only one.

As it stands, Assisted Area Status allows businesses in the areas chosen to apply for development grants, and this may well be something that will provide some help to the local economy. However, the next stage is to apply for so-called "Objective 2" status, which if granted would bring in the big money for the infrastructural development which we so badly need.

2. UNEMPLOYMENT

The number unemployed in Tottenham rose again in September to 12,657, as compared to 12,607 in August and 12,626 in July. This is edging up towards the 27% mark, and is a serious deterioration in the position. In September 1991, the figure stood at 10,413, (21.8%) and in September 1992 at 11,900 (24.7%).

Interestingly, as of a couple of months ago, many of the Tottenham UBO offices no longer keep records of the number of job vacancies in the area. We shall never know in future therefore exactly how many jobs the unemployed locally are competing for.

3. NEW RIVER HEALTH AUTHORITY

I have continued my running battle with NRHA over the summer, notably on the chaos surrounding so called Extra-Contractual Referrals. I continue to get some shocking cases of people who have been receiving treatment at central London hospitals for serious conditions, including cancer, and who are suddenly told that they can no longer get treatment. As you will have seen I have publicised some of these cases in the local press, since this seems to be one of the few ways of getting anything done about the situation.

I have had other cases of those who thought that they were on the waiting list for treatment at central London hospitals. When they enquired as to the date of their treatment they found that they had been simply struck off the list because NRHA no longer had a contract with that hospital any longer. They had not been placed on any list locally either. Local GPs confirm the view that this whole switch away from using the centres of excellence in London has been handled disastrously.

You may also recall the case of the late Mrs Ruskin, who died after spending 12 hours on a hospital trolley at the North Middlesex Hospital earlier this year. As a result of all the protest made about his, and with the help of the local press, there has now been an investigation into the case, and a new set of procedures established which are supposed to mean that no-one will wait more than four hours until they are admitted to a bed.

There are other examples of sloppy practice at the North Middlesex, and consequent disastrous results which I shall be revealing in the near future.

4. TOTTENHAM TRAFFIC

I have also been doing battle to get something done about the traffic flow, or lack of it, in Tottenham High Road. At one time almost 50% of the traffic lights were not

functioning properly, but this has now been corrected following my intervention. I am also concerned about the total lack of parking enforcement in Tottenham, which slows the traffic down considerably, especially around the Bruce Grove Area, and am trying to get something done on this also.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENTS

Over the summer, I was obviously involved in many events surrounding the death of Joy Gardner, and have done what seems like hundreds of media interviews on this and other matters. In addition I attended other meetings and functions as follows :

Tottenham Chamber of Commerce : Level 91 Housing Assn : Association of Jamaicans : Meeting with Council Leader re Jewish Nursery provision : Haringey Senior Citizens Rally : Football Trust Presentation of Cheque to Spurs : Ferry Lane Residents Assn : Broadwater Farm Forum : Apex Project AGM : Tottenham Task Force : Architects Assn : Wightman Road Mosque : African Caribbean Centre Public Meeting on Reparations : Voluntary Action Haringey.

OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

Press Conference for President Elect of Nigeria : Police Complaints Authority : Commonwealth Parliamentary Assn delegation to Malawi : Tottenham Pensioners to HoC : Labour Party Conference : West Indian Standing Conference : Colchester CLP : Southall Public meeting : Black Prisoners Group, HM Prison Littlehey : ANL Unity Demonstration : Meetings with Baroness Chalker and H.O. Minister Charles Wardle : Black History Week Lecture, Brixton.

Bernie Grant MP
25 October 1993