

Summary of Paul Wilson's speech at the National Assembly Against Racism Conference, 26th February, 2000, TUC House, London

Can we progress institutional change to eradicate institutional racism?

Many Chief Constables have followed a strategy of admitting to institutional racism, but at the same time have introduced solutions more akin to dealing with Scarman's 'rotten apple theory'

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge some of the good work that has taken place, particularly around the reporting and investigation of racist incidents, HOWEVER, it's true to say this has been patchy and inconsistent around the country.

I say this because from a survey of BPA's around the country it would appear that we have a plethora of working groups, advisory groups and task forces but little if any evidence of tackling the source of the institutional racism - the police culture.

It would appear that there is a reluctance to appreciate that the collective failure identified by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, derives from the make up and workings, the structure of the organisation. This includes not only the policies, practices, procedures and behaviour but the organic relationship between them and the dynamics this throws up. To tackle policy and practices without tackling the whole structure of the organisation will not tackle the institutional nature of the racism.

And it is the institutional nature of discrimination that is the far greater evil, an evil that is not eradicated by training initiatives, equal opportunity policy or the recruitment of more black people. No,

institutional racism calls for a series of radical interventions in order to bring about change in the policing culture.

Black people have little difficulty in identifying the police complaints procedure as a manifestation of institutional racism. This can also be said for black people employed within the police force. The system is weighted against individuals who wish to bring forth allegations of racism. Most black members of the public are opposed to police officers investigating fellow police colleagues because it's believed that the culture within the police provides such a strong bond so as to effect the integrity of any investigation.

In the same way that the police organisational culture undermines the effective investigation of police by the police that same culture undermines any attempt by police managers to tackle institutional racism. What I'm saying is this: if policing initiatives are influenced, constrained, hindered, inhibited and eventually 'normalised' by a pervasive police culture how are we to expect police to tackle institutional racism?

My view is this. Don't expect any dramatic improvement in terms of the police tackling institutional racism. It won't happen unless we focus upon an alternative means of addressing this problem, outside of training and recruitment - which seems to be all and end all for many Forces.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry is undoubtedly a vehicle that has raised tremendous awareness around the state of race relations in this country, however, I feel the recommendations from the Inquiry do not go far enough and, by themselves, are insufficient to tackle the enormity of the problem that we are gathered here to discuss - (police service and institutional racism.)

There are currently 43 police forces in this country, each with an enormous amount of autonomy, many with acute resourcing constraints and varying regional issues which can quite legitimately be blamed and

thereby serve to hinder progress on issues of diversity. Current measures employed by many Forces to meet the MacPherson recommendations can best be described as sticking plaster medication for a cancerous problem.

I believe that the alternative we should be seeking as a means of addressing institutional racism is a Royal Commission into Policing. Such a Commission, representing the multi-cultural nature of Britain would bring together all the issues and complexities of policing in a modern multicultural community. Let the Commission examine the requirements for the policing of a modern multi-cultural democratic society and how policing should be delivered in a fair and just manner rather than the present piecemeal and seemingly 'racist' manner in which we presently operate.

A few weeks ago I was present in this very hall, with Sir Herman Ouseley, to witness a large number of people from numerous backgrounds, ethnic groups and organisations, vent their frustration and disappointment at the announcement from the government that indirect racism would not be included in the Race Relations Act (Amendment) Bill.

That announcement provided the different organisations, ethnic and interest groups with the same focus, a focus which undoubtedly led to the government's 'U' turn on 'indirect racism'.

What I'm suggesting today is that we need that same focus if we are to see an end to institutional racism. At the moment I feel we are fractured in our views with no cohesive strategic message to the police service or the government.

We focus a great deal of time and energy on the outcomes of institutional racism e.g stop and search, because it's emotive and affects the lives of individuals and it's right that those casualties should receive our support, however, in the same way we collectively focussed upon indirect discrimination in the RRA Bill, we need to be strategic in our

approach to institutional racism. Anything less will play into the hands of those who would wish to prevarocate and maintain the status quo in the hope that some other issue will replace institutional racism.

Just remember this : changing the colour of the police does not change the police culture, changing police culture, however, may help to change the colour of policing.

Insp Paul Wilson
Chairperson
National Black Police Asociation (NBPA)