

Speech by Paul Wilson

Black Police Association Annual General Meeting

Monday, 19th October, 1998.

Good afternoon.....Home Secretary, Commissioner, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I have been approached on a number of occasions just recently and asked what do I feel about my photograph plastered all over the underground system as part of the Evening Standard advertising campaign. Well, I'd just like to say, for the record, that I have in fact complained to the Evening Standard.

Yes, I've found two Stations in South London that they've obviously missed!

The last twelve months has seen the credibility and reputation of the BPA reach almost unimaginable heights. Given that just four years ago we were viewed by many as a divisive group with no sense of loyalty to the police service.

We cannot fail to recognise that a new government has been instrumental in moving the issue of race to 'centre stage'. We have enjoyed a productive relationship with the Home Office, contributing in a number of important forums.

We have also welcomed a more positive approach from our own organisation, the MPS. And I am also pleased to be able to say that we have regular contact with very senior officers, providing our perspective on a whole range of issues.

This consultative relationship is particularly important to the BPA for the communality of our experiences as black police officers and civil staff mirrors the reality of life for many in the black communities.

I believe the greatest challenge we face, is also our greatest opportunity. Of all the questions of discrimination and prejudice that still exist in our society, the most perplexing one is the oldest, and in some ways today, the newest: the problem of race. Can we fulfill the promise of fairness and equality of opportunity by embracing citizens of all races. In short, can we become a police service with a multi-cultural outlook in the 21st century?

I've been in the MPS for fifteen years in total. It is true that during that time I have seen significant change, mostly for the good.

In fact when I joined the MPS in 1983 I recall walking into the police college at Hendon and seeing row upon row of smartly dressed young police officers. I remember scanning the rows until my eyes finally rested upon the one black face. That was indeed an eerie sensation.

Fifteen years later, last Monday in fact, I again visited the police college, this time as a student on a 'management development course'. Once again I surveyed the rows of young police officers standing smartly to attention.

I am able to say that the number of black faces had improved by 100%.

There were two. I no longer felt an eerie sensation because I have become accustomed to the reality of the situation.

A situation ladies and gentlemen that we must all become accustomed to for some time to come.

For within the current race relations legislation, budgetary constraints, general decline in overall police recruitment, it will take us many, many years before we can hope to reflect the communities we serve.

I'd like to speak a little about the 'management development course' I attended, essentially a series of presentations from representatives of numerous departments within the MPS.

The first was a powerful presentation, providing an insight into the implications, ramifications of our failures in the Stephen Lawrence investigation.

This was followed by an equally powerful presentation from , Mr Grieves's 'Race and Violent Crime Task Force'. We were shown where

we are now in terms of investigating racially motivated crime and then shown a number of impressive measures and systems that will take us, as an organisation, to where we want to be.

The two presentations had a considerable impact upon the seventy or so Inspectors present. I should add that there was one other black Inspector present who just coincidentally is the highest ranking black female officer in the uniform branch of the service.

During the course of the week we heard from a number of speakers all eager to tell us about the latest 'cutting edge' initiatives, policy etc.

Occupational Health and how we might manage and reduce sickness.

New measures and initiatives from our complaints investigation dept.

A risk analysis assessment procedure designed to help us assess the potential risk associated with the possible outcomes of our decisions.

A Business Excellence Model designed to assess how we deliver our service and how best to continually enhance that service through assessment and managed change.

Leadership principles designed to help us become effective, accountable leaders.

All good stuff, I'm sure you will agree.

However, I can almost detect that some of you are thinking 'yeah, but so what!!'

Well, allow me to look at this 'course' from a slightly different perspective.

On the Monday, the issue of 'race' was mentioned. There was no mention of race during the remainder of the week.

The context in which 'race' was mentioned was arguably a negative one in that it wasn't 'good news' for the service.

For the duration of the week all the speakers, bar one white female, were white males.

It is unfair of me to single out this particular course or any other course for that matter. However, some of you might have detected that I'm using the course to illustrate the day to day reality of life for many of us in the Metropolitan Police.

I call it the 'drip, drip affect'.

Let me explain in more detail what I have just said.

Again, using the *course* as a micro example of life in the police.

Did the course designer consider that only raising the issue of race in a negative context might contribute to the existence of any subconscious, low level resentment already present in the students.

Did he consider that the usage of white speakers throughout the week just might reinforce the myth that we have no suitably qualified black personnel within the MPS.

Did he check the ethnic composition of the group when designing the

course?

Did he consider the possible negative cumulative effect his ethnocentric perspective might have on the black officers?

What I'm really asking is why didn't the course designer consider the outcomes of his actions in the context of race relations?

The answer is simple: we do not, as an organisation, critically consider the outcome of our actions in terms of how we deliver our service to an increasingly multi-cultural community, be it internal or external.

It has been said that we cannot find examples of good practice in terms of developing an 'anti-racist police service'

However, you have heard me speak about a number of 'cutting edge' initiatives designed to take this organisation forward into the next century. It would seem we have considerable expertise and creativity when addressing issues which we consider vital to the future health of the Met.

The key to moving the Met forward, enabling us to meet the expectations of an increasingly multi-cultural community, enabling us to effortlessly recruit from the multi-cultural community, enabling the development of a multi-cultural workforce, is the application of this expertise and creativity

to dismantle these subtle but powerful institutional barriers.

We've heard about a *Business Excellence Model* as a means of mobilising organisational change.

We need a similar *Excellence in Diversity model*, equally as stringent and thorough, which we must apply to **everything** we do in this service.

The challenge is simple; we have to move from a 'mono-cultural' organisation serving a 'multi-cultural' society to an organisation that embraces and respects ethnic diversity.

I'm not advocating that the Commissioner should hang a poster of Bob Marley in his office.....

We laugh, but those of you that work in police buildings, how many pictures of black people do you see on a daily basis....without the words 'suspect' or 'wanted' underneath. What does the absence of any positive black images convey to the majority....it's the 'drip, drip effect'

However it is important to point out that prejudiced attitudes are not the essence of this subtle form of institutional racism.

Racism is unfortunately too often equated with intense prejudice

and hatred of the racially different--thus with men of evil intent.

This kind of racial extremism is not necessary for the maintenance of a racist institutional structure. For the most part the individuals that fail to analyse the outcome of their actions are not intentionally prejudiced and may well have positive attitudes towards black people.

However, we have to rigorously challenge the seemingly harmless Institutional practices that have existed for years, practices that exclude the participation of racial groups by procedures that have become conventional, part of the bureaucratic systems of rules and regulations.

In short, our association wants one thing:

A true multicultural working environment.

Who benefits?

We all do.

Racists who are not able to accept the full humanity of other people are themselves badly damaged - morally stunted - people.

The principal product of a racist society is damaged people and institutions - victims and victimisers alike.

When we reform these institutions, we give ourselves a better, more able,

more just society.

So although I am speaking today as the chair of the Black Police

Association, about our own workplace,

I want to invite you to think about every other workplace in Britain.

I would like you to recollect the “canteen culture” of the organisations you have known.

Recollect the moments that may have given you most pause, or a twinge of hindsight guilt.

It is in the subtleties that we read the temperature.

And it is not always a comforting reading.

From all that I have said today, you might imagine that I am bitter or discouraged.

I am neither.

The Metropolitan Police has been placed under tremendous scrutiny during the Stephen Lawrence inquiry.

The results have been difficult to deal with.

But I believe that good can come from this, if we are prepared to make the changes.

And we need to remind ourselves of this: what would we find if we held other public bodies and organisations up to such scrutiny?

Can we really imagine that the only organisation in Britain with these problems of institutional racism is the Met?

So let's not bog ourselves down in apportioning blame.

Far better that we look for the answers.

But in all of them we should be starting from the same premise:

you can't make a rainbow with just one colour.

To summarise then:

The BPA advocates the introduction of procedures and measures to ensure that we systematically and critically consider the outcome of everything we do in terms of how we are likely to impact on a multi-cultural community.

Dr. Martin Luther King had this to say about racism:

Men hate each other because they fear each other,

and they fear each other because they don't know each other,

and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other.

A tragedy has left us with some clear lessons.

We will be guilty of a much greater failure if we fail to heed them.

Thank you.

