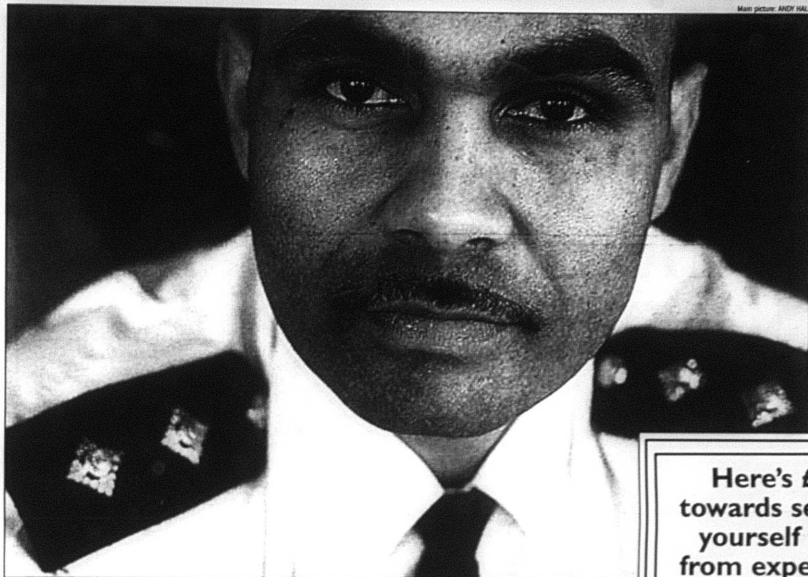


INSTITUTIONAL RACISM, THE EXPRESS TALKS TO A MAN FIGHTING IT FROM WITHIN



Main picture: ANEP HALL

BLACK AND BLUE: Inspector Paul Wilson, left, is one of only 20 senior black policemen in the Met police force. Norwell Roberts, below second left, was the first black officer to join, in 1967. He is pictured with the rookie Sir Paul Condon, below second right. Sir Paul as he is today, below right

next to him," he says, pointing at the rookie Paul Condon. Then he shows me a newspaper clipping about Roberts. "The next coloured policeman won't get so much space. London will have to get used to the idea," he reads, his voice dripping with irony.

Tall, well-spoken, charming, you can see how Paul progressed up the ranks to his current position at the Vauxhall police station, South London.

"He's very handsome, we all love him," giggles the receptionist at the police admin building in nearby Plumico, where the BPA has the loan of a cramped basement room. Paul himself is dismissive about his success. "I was resilient, quite hardened to the system and I worked it to my advantage but I was an exception. And there shouldn't be any exceptions." Black recruits should enter the service on the same basis as everyone else. They shouldn't have all these extra issues to worry about."

BROUGHT UP in Boston, Lincolnshire, Paul's father was a black US serviceman who married a white woman but left her when his children were still very young. Paul grew up "incredibly poor". He moved to London where he became a clerk in the Metropolitan Police Solicitors' Department. Inspired by what he saw, he decided to join up.

"I had a naive belief I could make a difference for black people. My friends and family



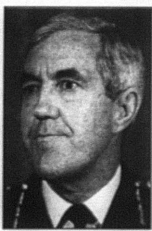
thought I was mad." At first Paul kept his head down on race issues, knowing chances of promotion were remote for anyone who was not "one of the lads". After he passed his sergeant exams in 1988, he knew it was time to act.

"For the first five years, I had had no power base. I still don't have much of one but once I was a uniformed officer, I knew I'd never forgive myself if I just sat back and had an easy life."

It is obvious, now, that Paul married to Sonia, another black police officer — sometimes regrets this decision. The baby-sitter has just let him down and he is fretting about how he can juggle a round of meetings at Scotland Yard with rushing

home to his daughter, four, and 18-month son. Yet, at such a sensitive moment in police history, most black officers are reluctant to stand out. "None of my black colleagues are speaking out at the moment, a hell of a lot of pressure is being put on them. I know that because of my rank people aren't going to give me a hard time but I do feel quite lonely," Paul says.

Only last week, a London industrial tribunal heard how PC Leslie Bowie, a black officer stationed at Heathrow, was driven to tears by colleagues' racial jibes. "In a group of people talking, you would hear someone say 'Why does a black man run so fast?' 'Because he's used to escaping after doing robberies,'" he told



the tribunal. Of 27,000 police officers in London, only 800 are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Drop-out rates are "alarmingly high" with one in five claiming to be going because of discrimination and harassment.

IT IS sad is that it has taken a terrible murder to bring the plight of black officers to light. "But some positive things have come of this," Paul says. "The Met has been put under a tremendous amount of scrutiny but, more importantly for the first time in the history of race relations in this country white-mongering, middle-class white people have realised these issues are real, that they affect everybody, and that the people who try to change things are not just some crazy group of militants banging a drum."

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