

EVIDENCE TO SCARMAN INQUIRY EVIDENCE TO SCARMAN INQUIRY
Submitted by the Friends of Blair Peach Committee 1981

1. We make this submission to Phase 11 of the Inquiry which, we are informed will consider the underlying causes of the 'troubles' with special reference to the problem of policing areas where the community is multi-racial'.
2. As you will appreciate it is not possible to view Brixton as an isolated occurrence. To be understood it must be put alongside other situations of which Brixton is merely a further development. The marked deterioration in confidence in the police in multi-racial areas has been a continuing saga deserving of a public enquiry before now. Our situation which illustrates the roots of many of the problems of Brixton are the Southall events of 23rd April, 1979. After that incident the call for a public enquiry went out from, among others, over 170 MP's, the National Executive of the Labour Party, the Southall Indian Workers' Association, the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Commission for Racial Equality, the National Union of Teachers, the General Council of the T U C, the 'Guardian', 'Times' and 'Observer' newspapers, and many thousands of other organisations and individuals. An inquiry was denied without adequate explanation ever being given. By almost any measure, the events in Southall were far more serious than those in Brixton; 700 arrests, many hundreds of injuries, the death of Blair Peach. The only significant difference from Brixton lies in damage to property, the duration of the disturbances and, perhaps, the impression that the police had in some way lost control. We believe that this leaves the unfortunate impression that the authorities will only agree to a public enquiry when they feel confident that it will not reflect adversely upon their actions. Furthermore, it is our view that had a full, public investigation of events in Southall taken place, then at least some of the underlying causes of the disturbances in Brixton, exactly two years later, might well have been averted.
3. We cite just two examples. A search of police lockers during investigations into the death of Blair Peach discovered a large number of non-regulation weapons : a brass handle; 1 leather encased truncheon with knotted thong at one end; 1 metal truncheon, leather encased with lead weight at one end; 1 sledge hammer handle; 1 sledge hammer; 1 American type beat truncheon; 1 rhino whip; 1 long metal bar with hook at end; 1 white bone handled knife; 2 crowbars; 1 blue case opener; piece of wood 3 foot long. On 19th April, 1981 the 'Sunday Times' published a photograph (enclosed) of someone in Brixton - no identified

himself as a police officer in plain clothes carrying a wooden stave. A BBC journalist on 12th April, 1981 on 'The World this Weekend' also described seeing plain-clothes police officers carrying a pick-axe handle and a 'flexible rubber hose' (particularly disturbing in view of the findings of the pathologist in the Blair Peach case that the injury to his skull could have been caused by 'a lead-filled rubber cosh'). After the Inquest into the death of Blair Peach, the jury called for regular inspection of police lockers. The Metropolitan Police assured the public that their recommendations had been acted upon. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether such searches have indeed taken place, why police officers were in possession of such weapons in Brixton and whether any disciplinary action has been taken as a result.

4. Secondly, after the events in Southall the Metropolitan Police informed the press that 'outside agitators and extremists' had deliberately provoked the violence. There was then, and there is now, absolutely no evidence whatever to substantiate this claim. Indeed, the Metropolitan Police were already aware when this statement was made that the vast majority of those arrested were Southall residents. After the events in Brixton, Sir David McNee himself assured the public that 'outside agitators' had again been at work. The only evidence cited was the large number of people with cameras. In the circumstances, we think it reasonable to conclude that the Metropolitan Police show a consistent and dangerous refusal to look critically at their own actions and responsibilities.
5. Both these points illustrate what we believe has become one of the major, if not the single most significant cause behind recent large-scale disturbances in London. Rarely, if ever, do the Metropolitan Police declare publicly that they aim to police 'by consent', and what the practical policy implications of this objective are. Rather, we have an emphasis upon the explicitly aggressive tactics of such groups as the Special Patrol Group, which are regularly defended at the very highest level (see Hansard 27th June, 1979). The issue is highlighted, we believe, by the fact that the police 'methods' in London are nowhere the subject of public knowledge, debate and decision, even by Parliament. This in turn gives rise to the divorce that now exists between the image of themselves that the police present and the actual experience of citizens, particularly in black communities. It is our view that this is a recipe for repeated mass disturbances such as that which took place in Brixton.
6. I would draw to your attention the two publications of the Unofficial Independent Cttee of Enquiry chaired by Professor Michael Dummett of Oxford University and published by the National Council for Civil Liberties, concerning the incidents and

police conduct in Southall on 23.4.79. :

Southall 23rd April 1979

The death of Elair Peach (supplementary report)

Should these not be available to the Enquiry, we would be pleased to supply copies.