

Protesting Operation “Hope & Recovery”

Refusing opportunism in our movement

What is Operation “Hope & Recovery”? After the uprisings, a group appeared calling themselves “Black leaders”, led by Lee Jasper (Co Chair, BARAC) and staged a rally on 19 August 2011. Panel speakers were all men except Diane Abbott (who spoke and then left). Parents – code for single mothers – were blamed for the riots. They spoke as if we don’t care about our children, exactly how the government attacks us. The desperate situation of mothers and other carers, children, young people and others most affected by racist and sexist cuts, and stop-and-search, were hardly mentioned, while a Tory Lord and other elites were presented as our “Black leaders”.

Operation “Hope & Recovery” is an attack on people of colour, making us responsible for the discrimination we suffer, our poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity, all of which led to the August uprisings. We’ve had enough of self-appointed leaders getting funding to attack our young people and our resistance. They aim to do the government’s job of putting people of colour back “in our place”. We have been through this before.

The community’s response to the police killing of Mark Duggan and the way his family were treated sparked riots, which put a spotlight on poverty, racism, stop-and-search and other police violence, and gross racist and anti-working class injustice in the criminal justice system. We can’t allow these issues to be swept under the carpet. OHR is attempting to trash our legitimate grassroots anger and energy for personal gain, proposing Black capitalism and financial enterprises, while markets crash everywhere. Our communities know from past

experience that such “enterprises” never trickle down to those of us working hardest. A few people will move up and push the rest of us further down.

The petition below was launched in response to this opportunism, and updated following the comprehensive study *Reading the Riots* in the *Guardian* (with the London School of Economics). While the British Crime Survey echoed the government, claiming that the cause of the riots was poor parenting and criminality (similar to OHR’s view), *Reading the Riots* found that people came together in response to years of humiliating stop-and-search, and other police brutality. It documents an outpouring of fury against relentless persecution, violence, corruption from police. People interviewed also spoke of poverty and cuts as major factors, as well as banks, corporations and politicians raking in funds, while our communities starve. The convictions of two of the murderers of Stephen Lawrence has finally exposed many other racist murders and other violence that the police have never pursued.

The organizers of Operation Hope & Recovery claim they have a “mandate” to launch a national movement. Who gave them any mandate? No one. A number of us who attended the OHR launch were shocked, and raised our concerns at the event and afterwards.

It’s urgent to speak out against this undermining of the grassroots movement by personal ambition posing as a movement for change.

Petition

Key issues coming from communities most affected, that must be considered are below. If you agree, please let people know by signing and circulating this petition.

- End ‘Stop and Search’
- No more deaths in police custody
- IPCC stop covering up for the police
- Stop demonising young people and criminalising our communities
- Restore services, benefits, housing, education and other grants and resources
- Stop blaming parents, especially single mothers, hounded into low-paid jobs by the government

- Oppose injustice in the criminal justice system, including Joint Enterprise
- Support those facing long persecutory sentences (already the UK has a higher percent of Black people in prison than in the US in comparison to population size) and families threatened with eviction.

Name.....

Organisation.....

Email.....

**Please return petition to Women of Colour-GSW:
womenofcolour@globalwomenstrike.net 020 7482 2496**

Please see over detailed report of what happened at the launch

Open Letter: Protesting vs “Operation Hope and Recovery” agenda

We attended the 19th August launch of Operation Hope & Recovery (OHR), but left shocked at the reactionary and opportunistic agenda. OHR is using the uprisings as a springboard to self-promote, and co-opt and corrupt a movement that is trying to get itself together after the horror of the shooting of Mark Duggan, and the rebellion that followed. OHR seems to be building a race industry rather than supporting a grassroots movement. Now the organisers claim the rally mandated them to launch a national campaign and ongoing initiatives. No such mandate was given.

The opening video at OHR focused on teenage pregnancy, gun crime, drugs – all sensationalist images typically used by politicians to demean and stereotype Black communities. While there was criticism of government policy and media reporting, the conveners steered away from practical organising against the cuts and other government attacks. Panel speakers repeatedly took up reactionary politicians’ views that took the spotlight off the attacks on us, and claimed the uprisings are the result of ‘bad parenting’ and ‘the family’ – a veiled attack on single mothers and families of people of colour generally.

Sexism

Women were marginalised: the panel speakers and chair were all men. Apart from Diane Abbot MP, a poetry reading and a singer, most women participated in a purely administrative capacity, at reception or carrying clipboards. The essential caring work mothers do under the worst poverty and unemployment most of us have ever seen, was not mentioned by the panel; women and men objected from the floor, but were cut short. Women of colour not only care for families with dwindling resources, but have to defend our children from discrimination and attacks at school and on the street, and from racist criminalisation, police and prison.

Lee Jasper (chair of Black Activists Rising Against Cuts – BARAC) scolded the audience of mostly Black women about disciplining our children. He boasted of checking what his children do, and where they go, as if other parents don’t care. Mothers are being driven out to work, often in the lowest-paid jobs, and at the same time admonished to be present to guide our children. 60% of lone parents, overwhelmingly single mothers, do waged work but are hardly better off.

Bogus leaders

Tory Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon was an invited panelist. Why? He said young people should seize the opportunities he had growing up, because “they are available to everybody”. How dare he say this, when every resource we need is cut or threatened, children have even been robbed of playing fields and libraries, and mothers are the first to be blamed for the resulting discouragement.

Black Clergy: for or against our communities?

US Bishop Wayne Malcolm advised people of colour to ‘buy homes’, again outrageously misplaced. In the UK, many people struggle to put food on the table and pay bills. Across the US, tens of thousands of people of colour, poor people and those most vulnerable, are occupying homes to fight foreclosures – caused by banking corruption. There is increasing anger at Black clergy who toe the establishment line, instead of making the way for the grassroots movement as they did in the civil rights movement.

OHR – a Black capitalist agenda

Another focus was “Black capitalism”. This is not about income generation, it’s capitalism. It aims to entice people away from putting any responsibility on the government which has been handing our resources to the banks and other of their friends in the City, and encouraging us into the self-seeking pursuit of jobs, positions or a little funding for a few, while the rest of us go to the wall. Talk of ‘financial workshops’ for the young is part of the smokescreen. We know from experience that such schemes don’t trickle down to those working hardest, and don’t include most of us.

Refusal to address causes of the uprisings

The uprisings uncovered how much the Coalition has deepened poverty and racism in the UK. Yet OHR seems as determined as the government to avoid this. Getting together against the cuts was not prioritised, nor was defending young people targeted by the criminal justice system, nor gathering support for the thousands thrown into prison since the uprisings.

A young white man who spoke about ‘stop and search’ as a key factor in the rebellions was patronised in a shameful manner.

Merlin Emmanuel proposed that police who kill be immediately suspended,

and that the IPCC stop covering up for the police. This was ignored by OHR conveners.

A young Black man boasted of working with the police and running a youth project, and was applauded. Meanwhile, young men of colour are 26 times more likely to be stopped and searched, and over 750 people have been killed by police since 1994 (mostly people of colour), yet not one officer has been convicted in relation to all these deaths.

Joint Enterprise and other unjust laws are landing young people of colour in prison for long sentences for crimes they weren’t involved in or even present when they happened. There are five times more Black people than white people in prison, and Muslim people are 12% of the prison population. Police target young people as criminals from an early age, and they should not be in schools, or youth projects -- such “partnerships” mean they are in charge.

Simon Woolley (Operation Black Vote) stressed that people should vote, ignoring the fact that many *have* voted (and got a coalition government run by millionaires). Successive governments have carried on with policies of war and austerity, however we voted. It has taken national riots to shake things up and put a spotlight on the terrible state we live in.

The gap between rich and poor is wider than it was 40 years ago; two-fifths of people of colour and immigrant people live in low-income households, twice the rate for white people. No one should be surprised at the uprisings, and they were multi-racial because the attacks, while disproportionately impacting people of color, are multi-racial, but the authorities and some media blame Black people, (and try to divide us as people of colour) to stop white people getting together with us in support.

As people of colour and anti-racists from different backgrounds, we reject building a race industry, where a few people of colour get on, at the expense of the rest.

Dr Andrew Asibong (Director, Birkbeck Research in Aesthetics of Kinship and Community [BRAKC]);
Ms Sara Callaway (Women of Colour in the Global Women’s Strike)
Mr Thomas Deltombe
Ms Isabelle Fourot
Ms Chantal Quiquine (Birkbeck College University of London)

