

OPEN LETTER: Calling out Opportunists, Hijackers & Police in the movement

The massive Black Lives Matter movement with its timely and urgent demands to end systemic racism is facing the threat of being diverted from its core demands. Attempts are being made to shift the focus onto manufactured issues that stereotype our communities, like “Black on Black” violence and knife/gang crime -- code words for labelling young Black people, often in poor communities, as criminal.

If this is allowed to happen, it would move attention away from racism and state violence, including police illegality, abuses, and deaths in police custody, to blaming youth or bad parenting in our communities.

We must not allow this!

It's urgent to call out this divisive tactic for what it is – an attempt to undermine and take charge of the popular, widespread BLM movement, which is Black-led, often by young Black women; multiracial and determined to be inclusive, including of queer, trans, people with disabilities, or other people most likely to be discounted -- a new coming together of all facing injustice.

Those involved in such sabotage depend on younger people being less aware of the history of anti-police violence movements over the years. But we are encouraged that several BLM groups have issued statements dissociating themselves from self-selected leaders turning up at rallies to represent the police view, even telling us not to criticise the police or Boris Johnson!

OPERATION TRIDENT (1998) & OPERATION HOPE & RECOVERY (2011)

The strategy of supposed “elders”, working with the police, cooling out the youth, while drawing on movement gains for their personal advancement has a history. [Operation Trident](#), a controversial Metropolitan Police unit focused on gun crime, was set up in 1998, not long after the public Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young Black man brutally killed by racists. The Lawrence family fought for the police investigate, for the prosecution, and the public enquiry, which found the police were institutionally racist.

Lee Jasper, a so called “community activist”, said [in his own words](#) that he “pushed for the police to set up Operation Trident”. It was done in the face of objections by Black communities, who felt it would increase discrimination. Trident expanded from its initial remit of dealing with “homicide affecting Afro-Caribbean communities”, to gun and gang crime across London’s Black communities. Lee Jasper continued to participate in Trident after becoming race advisor to London’s Mayor, and was on its advisory board for years.

In 2011, officers from Operation Trident were involved in the killing of [Mark Duggan](#), sparking mass rebellions across the UK. Participants described in graphic detail the [impact of daily persecution](#), and the terrorism of police violence leading up to the rebellions. They said, “The police is the biggest gang out there.”

A group of opportunists, led by Lee Jasper, claimed they had a mandate to call a national campaign, “[Operation Hope & Recovery](#)”, in response to the rebellions. The dominant narrative was: parents are to blame (a code for single mothers) for youth rioting, not the

violence of police or poverty. The panel included Tory Lord Ahmed, who said Black people should pull ourselves up as he had; and a young Black man who boasted of his police-funded youth project. At the same time, courts were running 24/7 to convict and give lengthy sentences to people involved in the rebellions, some as young as 11 years old.

This narrative has continued, flowing from knife-crime projects and promoted by Black ex-police spokespeople, some NGOs, and others influenced by the police. It is a narrative that contributes to divisions between African, Asian, Caribbean, Latinx and immigrant communities, and typecasts people of colour as the cause of crime, while hiding systemic racism including the horrendous crimes committed against us by police.

Ours sisters in the US confirm that this stereotyping of Black people as criminal or prone to gang violence has been central to the mass criminalisation and incarceration of millions of Black people. We also see it in the US “War on Drugs” which is another war on Black communities.

In the UK, the gang violence label was central to the increase in Joint Enterprise convictions, where groups of young men of colour in particular, were convicted and sent down for long sentences when they were nearby but had nothing to do with the crimes committed. One of these young men, is [Kevan Thakrar](#), an organiser behind bars, who has been held in solitary for most of the last 10 years years. (Sign protest letter against prison segregation units [here](#).)

MILLION PEOPLE’S MARCH (2020)

These issues came up again at the first ‘Million People’s March’ planning meeting in July. Representatives of two Black organisations in Tottenham and Hackney dismissed de-funding the police as a US not a UK issue! They said their focus was “Black on Black” and “Youth” crime, echoing the police agenda of deflecting from their violence to blame Black people for it. One is quoted calling for [harsher sentences for knife crime](#), when Black youth are already more likely to be wrongly convicted or get tougher sentences.

The organisers later argued to entirely remove from demands, crucially, the call to end Stop & Search. After concerns were raised, it was watered down to “end excessive Stop & Search”. Who decides what is excessive, the police? Stop & Search is always excessive and should be banned – against Black people, people of colour or white people. It is the tactic of a police state: repressive, terrorising the population by interfering in the daily lives of innocent people, leading to brutal and even lethal arrests. Tactics like these attract the most violent racist extremists into the police with the power to use handcuffs, lethal restraints, Tasers and guns against the people they hate or fear.

It is not accidental that these diversions are happening when BLM activists are being hounded on social media by extreme racists amplifying the police view. They say things like: “Can’t you put your considerable efforts into helping young Black men end gang killing and culture? Try education and acting as role models instead of squealing “racism”.”

We know from past experience in the antiracist and other movements for change that with the BLM movement rising, the police and other agencies will put their considerable resources into infiltrating, undermining and corrupting with the lure of projects, funding, publicity or other resources (for a price). Let’s not forget that the environmental justice movement has been shown to be infiltrated also. We must keep our eyes on the prize, and refuse these efforts to derail BLM as a force for change.

It would be a tragedy for the BLM movement which is bringing together so many sectors and getting so much support across nationalities and the colour spectrum, to be derailed into a race industry for the benefit of a few, instead of a movement that ends stop & search and

deaths in custody and uplifts all of us. There is no way of keeping an independent movement if we are being funded by the police and guided by their priorities. We all have to challenge those associated with taking funds from, acting and speaking for the police. The success of BLM as a popular growing anti-racist movement depends on it.

DEFUND THE POLICE: INVEST IN CARING, NOT VIOLENT POLICING

Defunding, or divesting resources from the police is a key demand. The police have huge resources for daily Stop and Search. Our communities are constantly under surveillance, including Black families organising to get justice after loved ones have been murdered, and by Prevent measures that target Muslim people, even school children as young as six. The police have plenty funds for tasers, shields, tear gas and other equipment. The UK has the [second highest police budget](#) per capita in Europe.

US, UK and global movements to defund the police include expelling the police from schools, and taking back policing budgets and putting the money into community needs.

We add to those demands the prioritising of rape, domestic violence and racist assaults – violent crimes that terrorise our communities, especially women, and should be vigorously investigated and prosecuted. Ending poverty and discrimination in pay, employment and housing, beginning with money for mothers and other carers who are looking after people in the home, the community and the work place and for our environment. Women are on the front line caring for and protecting loved ones from police violence and other injustices. If mothers and carers are respected and have resources, then those we care for including children and young people will be valued and respected, too. Police funds diverted to grassroots projects and services independent of police control, can reverse over a decade of cuts so we can thrive.

In the US, defunding is already underway in Los Angeles, Minnesota, Oakland, Seattle, and other cities.

Other core UK BLM Demands include:

- End Stop & Search (Black people are 10x more likely to face this humiliation) and Section 60 (allows police to be authorised to search any person or vehicle in an area where serious violence is “anticipated”).
- Abolish shoot to kill, tasers and lethal restraints.
- End Deaths in police custody; just compensation for families of those killed in police or immigration custody.
- End the criminalisation of children, and of sadistically taking them from their families without any legal process.

We can continue to grow the BLM movement by holding on to these demands as our principles, including our economic demands.

We can hold together, not allowing police to divide us, or be in charge of our movement, or buy us off.

Our aim is to leave no one behind, of moving together against racism and the violence of poverty. None must be left at the bottom, or at the top.

Together, the grassroots BLM movement can get every boot off all our necks!



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