

X **BV** *NEWS*

ISSUE 2 AUTUMN 2007



Follow the Leaders

**Conquering
the corridors
of power**

Political Pioneers

**US church
heart pounds
for politics**

– UK feels the beat!

**Economic
Justice
NOW!**

Rev Jesse Jackson

**Muslim, Sikh,
Hindu all the
same**

says the law

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Change**

Find out how - inside

WHO RUNS London



Operation Black Vote



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The WHO RUNS website is a dynamic and ever evolving source of information, detailing the nuts and bolts that make a city function

Further information contact OBV on 020 8983 5471
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Visit the WHO RUNS Birmingham? Website @ www.obv.org.uk



Editor's Note

Cheers to the pioneers

Two thousand and seven has been a good year for political firsts, clinking glasses resound up and down Westminster's heavy-panelled corridors.

Shahid Malik MP became the first Muslim Minister; Baroness Patricia Scotland the first woman Attorney General; Baroness Sayeeda Warsi the first Asian woman past the post as a Shadow Minister. And Diane Abbott winning election after election culminated this summer in the popular MP's celebration of 20 years in the Commons.

Cllr Rotimi Adebare was appointed Ireland's first Black mayor; Mohammad Asghar became the first ethnic minority Welsh Assembly member and Anna Manwah Lo the first person of Chinese origin to be selected into the Northern Ireland Assembly.

And these are just a few of the notables; there were many private and public sector firsts - some made a big media splash, others slipped by quietly but not insignificantly.

Some say pack away the champagne our success is no longer a special occurrence, British ethnic minority individuals striding the corridors of power is now commonplace. True, but Westminster is still shockingly underrepresented. So at least until the next general election, carry on clinking - cheers to the pioneers!

Get on Board

Civic engagement is part of our duty to society. Our schemes and projects allow access to government and the opportunity to experience the power structure at work. Our Councillor, Magistrates and MP schemes make a significant impact on society. This year alone over a dozen new UK magistrates will be sworn in as a direct result of our Magistrates project.

The diary of MP scheme graduate, Floyd Millen, who is battle-ready for the next general election, tells of his campaign to win hearts and votes; and Cllr Abdul Malik, one of our Bristol Councillor scheme mentors, tells why he believes it's vital to be politically active. Read Connecting Communities and contact OBV News if you are inspired.

As board members individuals influence decisions of great importance. It is vital that our communities seek to become involved in this area. To give a flavour of the different bodies and positions which can be applied for, we liberally sprinkle this issue with the voices of a range of board members.

A heart for politics

The black church community, like other faith groups, holds phenomenal power and is now waking up to the influence that could be wielded if it continues to develop its political muscle. This constituency is well positioned to become a force in civic society and use its considerable political, economic and spiritual power to make a real difference.

Keep hope alive.
Winsome-Grace Cornish
winsome@obv.org.uk



Contents

- 04** News from OBV
A note from Director Simon Woolley
- 08** Political firsts
Year end review of politicians making history by taking government positions
- 10** Party Political Broadcast
Hugh Muir assess the main parties' commitment to the black electorate
- 12** Under one law
Government laws and public reprisals are unfairly targeting and alienating Britain's Asian communities reports Aditi Khanna
- 15** Connecting Communities
Cllr Abdul Malik and Westminster hopeful Floyd Millen tells why a role in politics is a must
- 16** A New Agenda
Veteran civil rights campaigner Rev Jesse Jackson leads a new UK campaign for economic justice
- 18** Empowerment for the People
Ade Sawyer sums up the pre-requisites for economic improvement
- 19** Community News
- 22** Race Roulette?
Without a statutory committee will the EHRC competently address race discrimination issues, asks Lisa Gregoire
- 24** A heart for politics?
Marcia Dixon looks at how black churches in the UK are becoming more politically active by learning from their American counterparts
- 27** The Good Samaritans
The church showcasing good practice
- 28** More harm than good
Matilda MacAttram reports on new mental health laws and its impact on black families



Art Direction
Christophe Pierre for www.desgnbyspirit.com
Print
Hadar Communications
Publisher
Operation Black Vote
'our future in our hands'
Operation Black Vote is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.
Registered in Cardiff number 379770.
Registered Office: 18 Victoria Park Square
London E2 9PB
www.obv.org.uk



Cover:

Amerdeep Somal, Anna Manwah Lo MLA, Cllr Rotimi Adebare, Diane Abbott MP, George Osborne MP, Harriet Harman MP, Rev Jesse Jackson, Kuldeep Chauhan JP, Lord Navnit Dholakia, Ramesh Kallidai, Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Sayeeda Warsi

Director's Note



When ever you hear, 'this is not politically correct, but..' or 'freedom of speech entitles me to say..', or 'let's have an honest debate about immigration', as sure as night follows day, an insult and/or a gross untruth will surely follow. This has been particularly so in the last few weeks.

The most shocking example was perpetrated by the noble prize winning geneticist Professor James D. Watson. Gearing himself up to make a million on his UK book tour he sought to stir things up a little with some pseudo scientific arguments about racial intelligence. You know, court a little controversy, hide behind freedom of speech, and laugh all the way to the bank.

In the past Watson could have gotten away with it. Even some of his fiercest detractors would have said, 'I deplore what you say, but I defend your right to say it'.

Not this time. Organisations such as the 1990 Trust knew they had to quash the notion that this was an intellectual, scientific proposition, because any validity given to his rabid argument - Africans are genetically intellectually inferior to Europeans - would have opened the flood gates of racism. So instead of focusing on Watson and his freedom to say what ever he wanted to say, the target became those institutions that were giving him a platform. They had a responsibility to their board members, the Black community and wider society to uphold standards of decency.

Did London's Science Museum really want to be associated with this man and his bigoted views? Did he not cheapen scientific rigour, by using its cloak to espouse his personal racist feelings?

With such a furore the Museum was forced to agree with the grass root proposition: Watson was free to say what he wanted, but there could be consequences. The institutions equally had a right to evaluate their position and say if they saw fit, 'thanks, but no thanks'. The Museum saw fit and the tour was pulled, Watson was forced to resign from his post in the US, and a distinguished career was in tatters because he abused his position and the ideal of 'freedom of speech'.

“Whenever you hear, ‘this is not politically correct, but..’ or ‘freedom of speech entitles me to say...’, or ‘let’s have an honest debate about immigration’, an insult and/or a gross untruth will surely follow.”

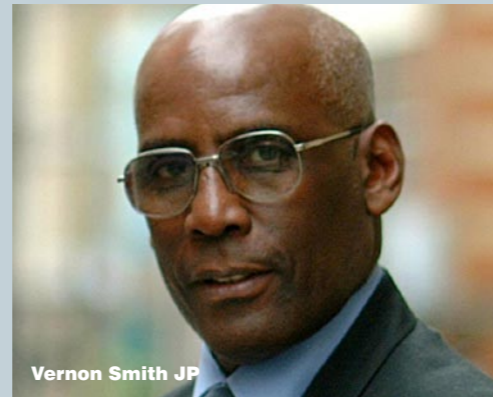
Other shameful examples were Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who boasted I want my book to be 'politically incorrect', before claiming multiculturalism rewards victim hood. Sacks wasn't sacked but was reminded that far right bigots throw the very same insults at his [the Jewish] community.

The Tory Candidate Nigel Hastilow, was however, forced to resign from the Tory party with his notion of an 'honest debate' about immigration by stating, 'Enoch Powell was right'. The last few weeks have not all been fire fighting, the prompt sacking of Hastilow by Tory Chair Caroline Spelman, showed real leadership.

Finally, on a more cheerful note, Deputy party leader Harriet Harman commissioned OBV to make the case for a change in the law to enable parties to use 'all black short list, and one of Britain's finest race equality activists Karen Chouhan and her family won brainiest family in Britain. I for one am so pleased she is on our side.

Simon Woolley

Congratulations!



Magistrate scheme participants (shadows) are community champions taking responsibility and making a tangible change within the criminal justice system.

The magistrates who mentor the shadows work doubly, carrying out their own duties and giving support to scheme participants who wish to follow suit.

Vernon Smith JP and Yvonne Powell JP are both sterling practitioners of their belief in community, becoming scheme mentors and staunch supporters of OBV.

Their hard work has reaped well-deserved rewards and we celebrate their recognition as recipients of MBE awards in this year's Queens Birthday Honours.



Yvonne Powell said of her award: "I am delighted to have been awarded the MBE for services to the administration of justice in Merton. This would not have been possible without the support and commitment of the staff and colleagues at Merton. One of the most worthwhile and enjoyable projects I have worked on is the Magistrates Shadowing Scheme. As magistrates we need to reach out and inform others about our work and be truly representative of the communities we serve."

(Vernon Smith is also an Independent Monitoring Board member see 'Public Life Profile')



You be the Judge

The success of OBV's Magistrates Shadowing Scheme proves that ethnic minority communities are ready, willing and active contributors to society. The project started with a small pilot in 2001 and since then more than 1,000 people have applied to be part of the scheme; 250 have taken part as magistrate shadows and a further 400 have taken part in one-day seminars.

More than 500 magistrates have given their time and enthusiasm to become mentors to the scheme shadows, and 70 courts around the country have played a major role co-ordinating the scheme in partnership with OBV and the Department for Justice.

The award winning scheme rolls out this year in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Doncaster/ Sheffield and Cardiff. The project will include a series of one-day awareness raising seminars providing information about the work of the magistracy and how to become a magistrate.

The seminars are designed to impart comprehensive information and advice for those considering a place in the magistracy. They are a perfect learning short-cut and alternative to the full six-month programme. The scheme will run from November 2007 until March 2008.

The project has been loyally supported by central office and Lord Chancellor Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP said: "The magistracy should of course reflect the communities it serves. We therefore support this important opportunity to encourage more people from the Black and minority ethnic population to become magistrates."

The scheme provides unprecedented access to the court system and has raised community confidence in the work of magistrates and the judicial process.

Simon Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote, said: "The judicial landscape is changing to mirror Britain's multi-ethnic society. These efforts must continue so that BME communities up and down the country have greater confidence in the judicial system at every level. We will see a rise in the numbers of BME individuals taking roles not just as magistrates but also on parole boards and other positions within the criminal justice system. The nation's social well-being depends on BME communities having an equitable stake within our decision-making institutions."

For information about the Magistrates Shadowing Scheme 2007-2008 programme and seminars contact: mag@obv.org.uk

Well Done!



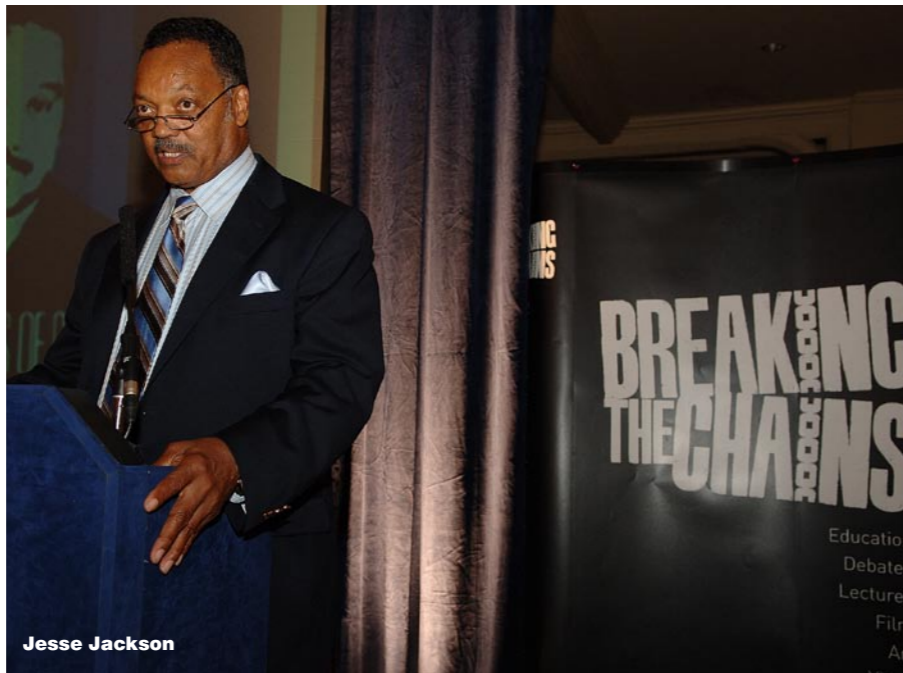
Front: Kirti Soni JP, Pamela Roberts JP. Back: Lord Lieutenant Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher and Ann-Maria Quail JP



Above left: Kuldip Chauhan. Above right: Surjit Mandair. Above: Gilles Casse

The roll call of Magistrates' Scheme graduates who apply and are appointed as JPs is constantly growing. Our heartiest congratulations this quarter go to Kuldip Chauhan and Qaisar Mahmood (Bedfordshire); Ann Marie Quail, Pamela Roberts and Kirti Soni (Buckinghamshire); Pradip Patel and Surjit Mandair, Leicester, Gilles Casse (London) and Sharon Sewell from Derby. The will be joined on the bench next spring by many others who are waiting to hear the result of their application.

Breaking the Chains



Jesse Jackson

The Bristol Councillor Shadowing Scheme celebrated its second phase graduation ceremony with a grand symbolic fireworks display.

More than 600 Bristolians and scheme participants were treated to a rousing empowerment address by Rev Jesse Jackson as part of the graduation ceremony held at Bristol's historic British Empire & Commonwealth Museum.

Apprentice star and entrepreneur Tim Campbell urged the graduates and audience to "keep their eyes on their vision and not become distracted by society that seeks to put limits on potential".

The graduation played a dual role linking the 'Breaking the Chains' - 200 years since the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in African people commemoration exhibition and the Equanomics UK tour.

The scheme is winner of the 2006 Local Government Chronicle Awards and the country's only Councillor Shadowing scheme. The project gives practical experience and nurturing to BME

individuals wanting to become politicians.

The on-going scheme pairs Bristol residents with high-level councillors from the three main parties over a six-month period to learn about the role and route to becoming a councillor.

Carol Douglas, who shadowed Cllr Judith Price, said: "I am keenly aware of the unfavourable statistics relating to young black boys and girls in the education and criminal justice systems. My concerns centre around their lack of opportunity and the need for positive representation which they can aspire to.

"The OBV experience has opened my eyes to the power within our community and it represents the growing numbers of individuals who want to contribute and make a difference. It has been a powerful experience which has inspired and filled me with renewed hope."

For information about next year's Councillor Shadowing Scheme, contact OBV at: councillor@obv.org.uk



Tim Campbell

Welsh Assembly joins the team



Assembled: Welsh scheme shadows

The MP shadowing scheme continues to spread its wings and recently launched a Welsh Assembly Shadowing scheme.

The scheme is in partnership with the National Assembly for Wales and aims to increase the number of Black and minority Assembly Members and councillors in Wales.

Following the format of the national MP scheme programme nine BME individuals from all over Wales are shadowing Assembly Members from all four main parties. They will also become Community Ambassadors, promoting democratic engagement within their areas.

The launch was held at the Senedd last month and speakers included Mohammad Asghar AM, the first BME Member of the National Assembly for Wales.

Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas said: "I am very pleased to be launching the scheme.

While the Assembly can boast that, during the second assembly, it was the first parliamentary institution in the world to have first a 50/50 gender balance and then a majority of women, BME communities weren't represented at all until this year when Mohammed Ashgar became our first BME AM. However his presence alone is not enough and anything that can be done to redress this balance is very welcome."

"BME communities weren't represented at all until this year when Mohammed Ashgar became our first BME AM"

Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas

Liverpool signed up

Liverpool City Council is also on board, signing up to run a Liverpool Councillor Scheme for 2008 - 9. The city presently has only one black councillor, who will work with OBV to increase BME interest in local politics. The scheme will begin recruitment by spring next year.

If you live in Liverpool and would like more information contact: councillor@obv.org.uk

Call from the pulpit

Bishop Doye Agma, Operation Black Vote Manchester co-ordinator, sprung into action immediately when he got the call that Rev Jesse Jackson and the Equanomics UK tour was heading for Manchester. He rallied the Manchester church community to get involved and they responded with great enthusiasm.

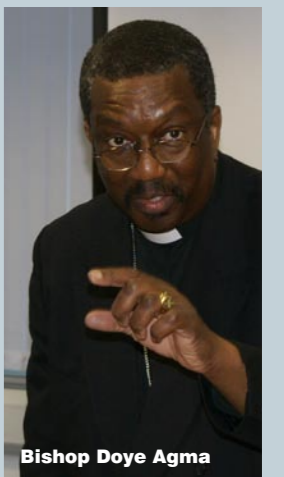
Two events saw more than 1,000 of Manchester's faithful gather in force to pack two church halls. The public events were held at the

Church of God of Prophecy and the Jubilee Church in Moss Side.

The message of political participation rang out from the pulpit with pastors and bishops alongside politicians and activists. After the event Shadow Chancellor George Osborne said: "I believe that tackling inequality is one of the great moral challenges of my generation. The Conservative Party is committed to meeting this challenge head-on".



George Osborne MP



Bishop Doye Agma

Who Runs

Looking for information on BME NGOs and community organisations and more? Look no further. Check out www.whorunsmycity.co.uk or find it at www.obv.org.uk

“The Guardian newspaper labelled us as the hate crime capital of Europe so electing its first Chinese parliamentarian in Northern Ireland certainly sends out a positive message that we have moved on and that we are a changing society.”

Anna Manwah Lo



Anna Manwah Lo

“My biggest regret is that after 20 years there are still only two Black women in Parliament...”

Diane Abbott



Diane Abbott

Political Firsts

Samantha Watson highlights a few political pioneers taking charge within the establishment

The next election will see an unprecedented number of BME (Black minority ethnic) Conservative Party candidates contest seats around the country. 2008 may prove another landmark in political history and see the country elect its greatest number of ethnic minority Members of Parliament in any one election.

As we wait to celebrate what we hope is the dawn of a new era for politics, we pay tribute to those who have paved the way and others who are breaking new ground across the United Kingdom.

January 1987 marked a historical first in British politics when Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng, Diane Abbott and Keith Vaz entered Westminster as Members of Parliament. Dadabhai Naoroji, had broken the mould when he entered the House of Commons as the first Asian MP in 1892, but this time a record four new MPs were from the BME community.

At the time, Diane Abbott, who earlier this year celebrated 20 years in office, also

scored by becoming the first Black woman MP to set foot on British political soil.

Over the past 20 years, many more ethnic minorities have continued to make their mark in politics. Britain's first Muslim MP, Mohammad Sarwar, was elected in 1997; Baroness Amos became the first Black woman to be Labour Leader to the House of Lords in 2003; Adam Afriyie became the first Black Conservative MP in 2005 and the late Bernie Grant was also Britain's first Black councillor in the early 80s.

When Gordon Brown succeeded as Prime Minister this year he brought fresh faces to the line-up in government and further changes to the racial make-up. In June, Shahid Malik became Britain's first Muslim minister for the Department for International Development and in that same month Baroness Scotland became the first Black woman appointed as an Attorney General, taking on the responsibility of issues related to crime reduction, equality and advising the government on legal affairs.

On the anniversary of her time in Parliament, Abbott, MP for the Hackney North and Stoke Newington constituency, celebrated the occasion among community figures, celebrities and many more promising politicians.

Speaking of the moment when she

became an MP, she says: “I cannot believe that it is 20 years since I was first elected. The years seem to have gone by in the twinkling of an eye. One of my proudest moments was Election Day in 1987 itself.

“Throughout the campaign people kept telling me it could not happen. When they announced the result in Hackney Town Hall it felt like a dream. My biggest regret is that after 20 years there are still only two Black women in Parliament.”

This year alone has been one such year where a remarkable number of ethnic minorities have made political firsts throughout Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have made huge political statements about the progress in their ruling governments as a number of ethnic minorities took substantial places of power.

The formation of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament also made it necessary to see the dynamic cultural make-up of the communities reflected within the respective governments.

Pakistan-born Mohammad Asghar of the Welsh political party Plaid Cymru, known as ‘The Party of Wales’, was the first minority to be elected to sit as a Welsh Assembly member. Speaking to OBV he said that it was a great honour to be selected

and that it marked a new beginning for politics in Wales.

He explains: “Wales is our home. I want all communities to take part fully in the democratic process and the fact that I have been elected into the Assembly is a huge statement on the strides being made here.”

As selections for members of the Welsh Assembly got under way, Northern Ireland was also making the same progress. Anna Manwah Lo became the first person of Chinese origin to be selected into the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Explaining the significance of that moment she says: “Outside of Northern Ireland we’ve been known as a bigoted society both on sectarian attitudes as well as racist attitudes. The Guardian newspaper labelled us as the hate crime capital of Europe so electing its first Chinese parliamentarian in Northern Ireland certainly sends out a positive message that we have moved on and that we are a changing society.”

The forming of Scotland’s parliament was one of the most eagerly anticipated changes in British history. The appointment of Bashir Ahmad as a Member of the Scottish Parliament captures the sense of what Scotland wants to achieve to become more representative of its ethnic communities.

Ahmad describes that moment with the



Shahid Malik

words, “it was about time.” He adds: “The previous situation, where we had the first eight years of devolution without an ethnic minority MSP, was simply unacceptable. I am glad that the SNP [Scottish National Party] corrected this by promoting and advocating the need for the first BME MSP. I think with my election the message is clear; Scotland is a nation of many cultures and everyone should be given an equally strong voice - our diversity is our greatest strength.”

Earlier this year in Ireland, Cllr Rotimi Adebare Adebare, originally from Nigeria, was chosen as the first Black mayor of Portlaoise town. He arrived in Ireland in 2000, settled in Portlaoise and has not

“everyone should be given an equally strong voice - our diversity is our greatest strength.”

Bashir Ahmad

looked back since. He is presently working on a project called Fusion, which aims to integrate immigrants into the wider community.

Adebare says: “On the day of my inauguration there was the phrase, ‘Ireland is a country of a thousand welcomes’, what my appointment tells the Black community is that Ireland is not only a country of a thousand, but also a country for equality - a land of equal opportunities.”

As more people from minority ethnic communities realise the potential to excel in politics and the need for far greater political participation, Adebare believes that it is of great significance for BMEs to engage positively because “whatever we do today lays down foundations for tomorrow”.



Sayeeda Warsi:
Climbing the Conservative ladder

Out of Sight...

Gordon Brown affected disparate groups of people when he called time on the election that never was. If David Cameron made great play of feeling jilted, what about the constituency workers up and down the country – of all parties – who had already begun to gear up for the frenzy of an autumn poll?

Let's also take some time to think about the opportunity missed – or perhaps just deferred – from the point of view of Britain's minority communities. Election time is the best time for communities who so often feel neglected and marginalised. Suddenly, they become objects of affection and rivalry among the mainstream parties who alight – albeit temporarily – upon the fact that elections are not just fought on the front pages or in a handful of marginal seats, but up and down the country. For a glorious moment, they seem to realise that the support of black voters can matter. Too quickly, the moment passes.

But perhaps this is too negative a view. If the next 18 months or so are going to be a bare-knuckle fight between the major parties, perhaps there will be scope for the Black electorate, aspiring Black MPs and would-be Black councillors to take advantage of that. If the polls continue to suggest just a few points

With the brief October election fever now a dim light in the nation's memory, Hugh Muir questions whether the parties will keep the black electorate in their sights in the long run-up to the big day



Boris Johnson: watermelon man

of difference between Labour and the Tories, isn't it possible that the concerns of Black communities will rise up the political agenda? Support is there to be garnered. How will the parties best position themselves?

Labour has been examining the issue through its Ethnic Minority Taskforce, chaired by MP Keith Vaz since July 2006. The party claims a good record. Mr Vaz says that since 1977 Labour has amassed its highest ever number of minority councillors, MPs and peers and it has more minority members than any the other major parties. But where does it go from here? Using the muscle of being in Government, the party can cite advances such as the increase in school funding per pupil, which has increased by more than £1,000, and the employment of 30,000 extra teachers. This, the party says has a direct impact on minority communities. Exam success for Black African and Caribbean pupils is rising faster than for any other social group. But what about representation? Last month Mr Vaz re-ignited the debate about the need for all-black candidate shortlists when he told The Guardian: "It's the only way we're going to increase representation. We have to positively discriminate in favour and have all-ethnic minority shortlists." The party is also looking at its own administration.

Mentoring schemes aim to find more minority organisers and party strategists. The Tory pitch to Black communities is, as always, weighed down by baggage.

Boris Johnson, its anointed candidate for the London mayoralty, has hardly helped with references to black people, their "picanninies" and their "watermelon smiles". The comments, though old, make him and the party an easy target for Labour. And yet the Tories can also point to achievements under David Cameron. Four of the Shadow Cabinet frontbenchers are minorities and it has nine candidates in seats classified as winnable. Kulveer Ranger was recently appointed to replace Sayeeda Warsi (Shadow Minister, Community Cohesion), as Vice Chairman for Cities. In the capital James Cleverley has every chance of winning a seat on the London Assembly. The party also has two minority MEPs. George Osborne, the Shadow Chancellor, recently took up a prominent position beside the Rev Jesse Jackson at a high profile Equanomics event in Manchester. The wooing has also extended to the ethnic press where party luminaries such as Francis Maude and Caroline Spelman have been keen to make themselves visible.

In this regard, as in so many in British politics, Liberal Democrats find themselves

squeezed but they too see the need to sharpen their act. The party does not have any minorities among its 63 MPs but two, Lord Dholakia and Baroness Falkner, are peers. Saj Karim is the sole minority MEP. Last year the party established a 'diversity fund' to fight target seats where women and candidates from ethnic minorities and with disabilities are chosen. Of the candidates selected thus far, seven from 135 have self-identified as being from an ethnic minority background and several will fight potentially winnable seats. Issan Ghazni has also become a key figure for Lib Dems for he is conducting a review of their policies and practices. One issue he will consider mirrors the debate now heating up in the Labour Party: the concept of all-black shortlists.

The major parties can happily agree that something must be done but what remains to be seen is how they will actually approach the issue in the period between the election that never was and the genuine poll now likely in 2009. Will the enthusiasm for more minority involvement endure or will it be swept aside in the catfight over other issues such as policing, health, education and Europe? The past provides scant reason for optimism.

But we live in hope.



WHEN Shazia Sharif was verbally abused on the street she was more shocked than angry. She got home shaken and told her family about it but it did not even occur to her to report the crime to the police.

The 21-year-old Muslim sales professional said: "I did not think about reporting it as it was just a case of abuse. Maybe if he had physically threatened me in any way, I would have gone to the police."

The incident, which took place soon after the London bombings on July 7, involved a white man in a red van who yelled out abuses such as "go back home" as he drove past hijab-clad Sharif in south-west London.

For Nitin Gulati, a 22-year-old Hindu

student, it involved a more intimidating exchange. He was cornered at the exit of a Tube station in north London by two men who insisted: "Pakis like you should be blown up."

He recalls: "It was pretty late in the night and one of them had a knife. I let them go on with their tirade but could not escape getting slashed on my arm. I didn't think of going to the police because I was just happy to escape alive. What would the police have done?"

Such overt incidents have been on the rise since the 2001 September 11 attacks in New York changed the world's perception of security forever. The Asian community in Britain has been overcome by a sense of being under siege, as targets of revenge

by the general public or suspicion by the authorities.

The police in Britain acknowledge that under-reporting of faith hate crimes is still a big problem despite more than 30 specialist community safety units being set up across London alone with specially-trained investigators. According to figures released last year, police claimed that such crimes fell for the first time since the July 7 bombings. There were 24 crimes reported in January 2006, fewer than half as many as the same month in 2005.

But Hindu Forum of Britain secretary-general Ramesh Kallidai warned: "While it is obviously good news as these figures should never go up, it is absolutely crucial that these crimes are reported more. In a

lot of cases the victims are unaware that a crime has been committed. We are working towards setting up third-party reporting centres in temples combined with a hate crime helpline where people can make complaints anonymously."

Azad Ali, spokesman for the Muslim Safety Forum, added there were major issues that contributed to under-reporting.

He said: "There is a lot of fear. The reassurance that the public needs to report hate crimes, and Islamophobia particularly, hasn't really reached the level it needs to."

Some of the other reasons behind under-reporting include apathy, doubt that the culprit will be caught and not knowing what to do after walking into a police station.

Most Asian communities feel Islamophobia is the biggest threat to their life in Britain. It transcends boundaries of faith and religion as there is often very little to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims.

Mr Kallidai added: "There is serious concern within the Hindu community that they are being the targets of Islamophobia. There are no exact figures or a study on these incidents of mistaken identity but it is important to look into it. I have discussed this issue with Scotland Yard recently. Unless we know the extent of the problem it will be difficult to deal with the various levels of vulnerability that Hindus are exposed to."

"It is important for the government not to engage with just one community. Hinduism is the third largest faith group in Britain after Christianity and Islam. It is important that it can exist and be heard in its own right. To link the Muslim issue with every other Asian community is very unhelpful because there are different group dynamics at play."

Between April and August this year police officers made 32,395 stops and searches in London alone. The latest statistics show that just over a fifth (6,755) of those stopped was classed as Asian - almost twice their proportion in the capital's population. The number of stops has leapt since the attempted car bombings on June 29 this year.

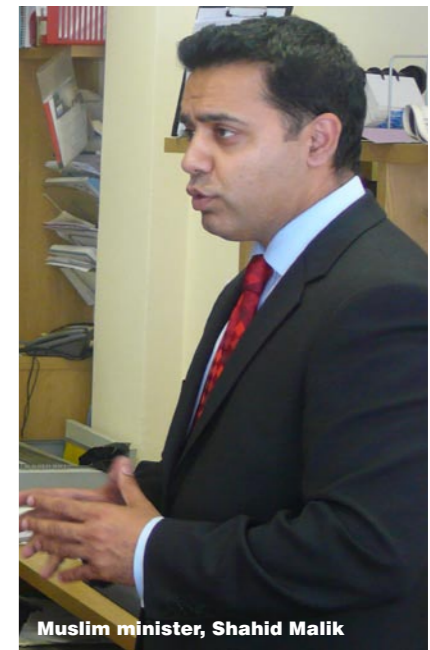
Commander Rod Jarman said: "Terrorists live, work and blend in to our communities. Terrorists can come from any background and live anywhere. They are as likely to be seen in quiet suburban roads as they are in inner-city areas. To complement our covert methods of fighting terrorism we have a more visible presence to deter and disrupt terrorist activity."

This atmosphere of growing vigilance has hit the Sikh community extremely hard. Besides their turbans becoming a target of searches, a lot of them are forbidden from carrying their symbolic religious daggers.

Jagtar Singh, vice chairman of Sikh Federation UK, said: "The new rules were introduced without any consultation with Sikhs. Also, it gives discretion to security officers. There have to be clear rules. It is very offensive that the turban is treated as a hat and the religious dagger is classified in the same category as a nail-cutter."

"If it remains an ongoing problem, we will use official channels like the Foreign Office. One of our biggest demands is to be counted as a separate ethnic group in the Census 2011. It is very important for our rights in the public sphere."

It is these increasingly difficult and complicated race issues that most faith groups hope that the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) will tackle head on.



Muslim minister, Shahid Malik

③ Times Unlucky?

In October Muslim minister, Shahid Malik was stopped and searched at Washington DC's Dulles airport following a series of meetings on tackling terrorism.

The deeply disappointed but forgiving Minister responded to the Dulles incident by issuing a statement saying, "Following discussions with the USA Ambassador to the UK, Robert Tuttle, I have happily accepted his apology for the mix up that occurred during my departure from Washington Dulles airport over the weekend. In addition, following discussions with representatives from the Department of Homeland Security in the USA, I want to reiterate my belief that no malice whatsoever was intended. I am looking forward to getting back out to the USA and continuing our work in tackling the common global challenges that our great nations face."

A very generous and dignified response since this was not the Minister's first US detention. The MP for Dewsbury was searched at JFK airport, New York last year, and has had his hand luggage checked for explosives at London's Heathrow airport.



Under One Law

Board members Amerdeep Somal, Aneeta Prem and Harmander Singh give their response to the issue of unfair targeting

Amerdeep Somal

Commissioner of the Independent Police Complaints Commission



"An effect of the disproportionate Asian stop and search figures is the potential alienation of a section of the community whose help is needed to defeat terrorism. It may well also undermine confidence in policing, which is difficult to reconcile with the need for police to achieve the necessary "buy in" from the public. Effectively combating crime requires support from the community.

Asian people, like everyone else, do not want to be victims of crime, whether terrorism-related or not. Stop and search is an inherently intrusive form of policing and hence potentially disruptive to the overall objectives of neighbourhood policing. The IPCC monitors and evaluates stop and search practice and in recognition of its high profile since July 2005 all complaints and conduct cases arising from the use of Section 44 (s44) of the Terrorism Act have been referred to the Commission, and figures show that 0.2% of arrests for s44 stop and searches resulted in an arrest for terrorism offences.

Stop-and-search is a controversial topic and was a major catalyst in leading to successive attempts to improve police/community relations and reforms of the police complaints system. One of the biggest challenges for the IPCC is how to ensure the complaints system is used to full effect and offers an effective means of redress where appropriate. Another significant challenge is how to ensure that stop and search activity is not indiscriminate but is intelligence-led, proportionate and properly managed. Increasing public confidence in the complaints system is an ongoing challenge we are working to address".

Harmander Singh

board member of social policy think-tank Sikhs in England (SIE)



The events of 7/7 affected everyone adversely in four ways: the victims and their loved ones suffered personal loss and real pain; the public faced challenges to retain a united front; Muslims and visible minorities faced a spate of backlash hate crimes and the world reacted with renewed zeal and suspicion against Eastern/minority faiths.

Bodies such as Sikhs in England (SIE) increased their efforts to educate authorities and adherents to reduce community tensions, implement protective and risk-assessed measures in order to help with reassurance and response strategies.

For Sikhs, the struggle to convince the media and non-Sikhs of their distinct and unique separate faith identity remains the biggest obstacle to date, and the situation is getting worse for the Sikhs as they face increasing attacks on their articles of faith by the authorities both in the UK and elsewhere. For example, denial of entry to Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs into the offices of the European Parliament, targeting Sikhs for additional screening by the TSA (Transport Security Administration) at US ports, apartheid-type practice on security grounds in UK government buildings, which encourages anti-Sikh measures by UK-based private companies and venues such as the London Eye and Madame Tussauds.

SIE continues to engage with the public, private and faith/voluntary sector agencies to increase the awareness of policy-makers and service-providers as to the impact of their often misguided views about Sikhs.

Aneeta Prem

Metropolitan Police Authority member



"We recognise that there is a genuine atmosphere of fear and suspicion among some sections of London's Asian communities, partly fuelled by inflammatory and irresponsible coverage of terrorism by some sections of the media, and partly as a result of hate crime, which might be more prevalent than reported crime statistics would suggest.

We can make a difference by opening up the MPS to public scrutiny, where they address the policies and practices which impact on Asian communities disproportionately, or which add to feelings of fear and suspicion.

We also ensure transparent accountability

"...ensure people are treated with respect and fairness..."

through close examination of the way in which stop and search or stop and account is carried out by police, through review boards and via our own MPA committees, giving members of the public or their representatives a voice to shape the way in which policing is delivered to our communities in London.

There will always be hurdles to overcome – misreporting or misunderstanding, but as long as we remained committed to providing people with accurate information, and continue to work with police and other agencies to ensure people are treated with respect and fairness, no matter what the pressures, we should go a long way towards reassuring our diverse communities".

Stand out from the crowd Connecting

Communities



Journey to the House of Commons

For many the route to Westminster is paved with silver spoons and fairy godmothers. For others it is sheer hard work and determination that gets them a seat on the coveted House of Commons green benches. Floyd Millen hopes to testify to that. In the meantime here's a day in the life of his journey to the House of Commons.

"Since October 2006 I have actively stood and fought for selection in the Forest of Dean, Bristol West, Putney, and Liverpool West Derby I have driven thousands of miles, knocked hundreds of doors, posted around 7,000 letters, made nearly 5,000 phone calls, spent thousands of pounds, slept in cheap bed and breakfast outlets, significantly contributed to the profits of the petroleum industry – in fact any day now I hope to receive a call from one of the major oil companies offering to sponsor me – in my dreams.

This has been a journey unlike any other; the highs and lows have been palpable and the intention of not taking disappointments too personally has been lost on many occasions. The by-products include feelings of paranoia, scepticism, false sense of security, hope mixed with feelings of futility.

The costs are inhibitive: not being part of an 'in crowd' also has consequences. However, the inextricable truth is that having access to something is very different than being able to access it: furthermore, access does not necessarily mean access through it. The doors 'may be' open through the procedural selection processes but there is a significant number of swinging doors poised to knock you out of the game.

The impact on family life is at the very least trying. Constituencies cover vast areas and it sometimes feels that no matter what you do you cannot address or even attempt to please some of the people some of the time. This, however, does not leave me feeling overly pessimistic.

As many will testify the selection process is lonely, has many pot holes, and could leave emotional scars, and while colleagues, friends and acquaintances are enthused and encouraged by my sheer determination and obstinacy, the reality is that more of our citizens need to take an active part in the local democratic process and actively decide at the local level who will represent them.

Why do I put myself through all this? Well, the answer is simple. I have fire in my bones and something special to contribute for and on behalf of the good citizens of this country.

I am committed to pursuing this relentlessly and will continue to stand until the last seat has closed! What has become clear is that this process is not primarily based on meritocracy but is as much about contacts, wider participation and other forms of influence. When all is said and done, I intend to blaze an indelible trail across the selection landscape, secure my selection and provide a ladder for others to realistically follow.

Having done all to stand just stand and be counted."

Floyd D. Millen
www.floydmillen.co.uk



Lending a helping hand

Cllr Abdul Malik is Bristol's first Asian councillor and an OBV councillor Shadowing Scheme mentor. He believes that sharing experiences is a great learning tool. He stood up to be counted, he won, and he's now reaching down to lend a helping hand.

I have always believed that we need to have a representative council and this was one of the main reasons I stood for election as a councillor in 2005, and even though Bristol now has a 'beacon status' for its approach to equalities I feel that there is much work to be done to have true representation.

The OBV Councillor Shadowing Scheme has been a great success in Bristol due to the commitment of the council members to the equalities cause. The participants on the scheme were from different backgrounds and meeting with them and exchanging views on democracy has been one of the most interesting experiences in my two years as a councillor.

It was a pleasure to be a mentor for this brilliant scheme and I was privileged to have Mam Seedy Njie from Gambia as my shadow. His commitment to democracy and a as well as his community experience was truly inspirational - this is one of the many experiences that councillors from inner-city wards would probably not be able to have without OBV.

The scheme is not only useful in sharing your experiences with others, interested in the democratic process, but is an asset to councillors themselves who have a chance to reflect on their various tasks as they try to share them with others. This year we had ward elections and my shadow accompanied me in a ward campaign, I felt his experience was valuable and we were able to canvass and share experiences to benefit the campaign.

OBV, I feel, has helped to tackle the barriers we have in Bristol within the council's political groups as well as within the chambers of this wonderful city. We now have four council members from BME communities and I feel this is due to the lessons learnt from this scheme, as well as from the participation and enrolment by all political parties to the ideology of OBV.

This project in my opinion has broken many barriers and it is up to communities to participate in it fully to benefit Bristol as a whole.



Rev Jesse Jackson and politicians



Church leaders set a new agenda

A Good Image

Nottinghamshire Black Police Association Chair Ron Lawrence was the official photographer for the recent Equanomics UK Tour led by Rev Jesse Jackson. The tour images in this issue were all taken by Ron. If you attended any of the Equanomics events you may find yourself featured in a photo or two. Visit the Equanomics Tour Gallery at www.equanomics.org.uk to view or order pictures. Contact Ron Lawrence at: ron@equanomics.org.uk

View from the Pulpit

A first stop on the tour was meeting black-majority church leaders from around the country.

The meeting, convened by Operation Black Vote and hosted by MP David Lammy, gathered more than 30 prominent church leaders to seek ways to work together to empower communities. Titled Ask, Seek, Knock, the round table was welcomed by the leaders who recognise that by working together they can set a new agenda for political and economic development. MPs Diane Abbott and Dawn Butler

joined the chorus to encourage the church to play a central role in political activism.

In his address, Rev Jackson included a simple ten-point plan for ministers and parents to adopt. He asked pastors to invite every parent to bring their child's school report for their pastor to read and countersign. He said: "Do this at the end of every term as a way of demonstrating your interest and commitment to that child's education."

He continued: "On the Saturday or Sunday before children return to school for the new term, hold a parent, teacher and pupil meeting at the end of the morning service.

Call them forward, pray for them and invite any concerns to be shared with you then or at an appropriate time in the week ahead. Act upon any concerns."

He also said: "Take and collect your child to and from school. Meet your child's teacher. Exchange phone numbers with the teacher and turn off all television in the home for at least three hours per night".

A New Agenda

Jesse Jackson took Britain by storm and began the campaign for economic justice

Civil rights campaigner Reverend Jesse Jackson, head of the Chicago-based RainbowPUSH Coalition - an organisation working to achieve greater social and economic uplifting of black America - took on a seven-city tour of the country, leading the Equanomics UK campaign.

Equanomics UK is a 1990 Trust initiative which involves a coalition of organisations seeking to develop a more economic-based focus of the UK equality debate.

The ambitious plan aimed at raising the level of political awareness and participation took off nationwide and caught the imagination of communities eager to see a change.

Rev Jackson raised the roof in civic and church halls around the country. Urging more than 11, 000 people to discard "a grasshopper mentality and think like the giants they truly are". Reminding crowds that as a result of slavery and colonisation black people are creditors not debtors to the countries that, through gross exploitation and savage oppression, profited from their free labour.

The tour also marked the 200th year since the abolition of the transatlantic trade in African people.

Taking the initiative

The British Muslim Initiative also held a dinner for Rev Jesse Jackson to meet individuals and representatives from a spectrum of UK Muslim organisations.

Welcoming Rev Jackson, Ismail Patel spokesperson for BMI, acknowledged his legacy, stating, "He was the conscience of America and the great unifier, challenging America to establish just and humane priorities." He further added and called for Rev Jackson to "help guide the Muslims to counter Islamophobia and call for justice in the Holy Land".

Speaking at the dinner in East London, Rev Jackson said forging a united front between all ethnic communities was critical. Addressing the diverse audience of leading community, business, trade union, political and media figures from white, Muslim, Asian and black communities, Rev Jackson urged ethnic minority communities to utilise their huge social, economic and intellectual resources to end marginalisation and bring about real change.

Pointing to the example of shareholder action by black

communities in the US, Rev Jackson said the way forward for ethnic communities was unity, emphasising that when one community is under attack, all communities suffer. Rev Jackson stated: "We need a coalition so we can share information. We need an infrastructure like multi-nationals have."



Equanomics Head - Karen Chohan address Muslim leaders. (Seated Respect's, George Galloway)

Empowerment for the People



To attain economic parity ethnic minority communities have to be given the opportunity to help devise non-discriminatory policies that will give them an equal chance to compete at all levels, says Ade Sawyerr

“The way for ethnic minority people to gain economic parity is through political power, on local councils and as representatives in parliament.”

Ethnic minority communities are now a maturing population with more second-and-third-generation minorities born in this country than the first generation, who were born in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa.

There are individual economic successes but as long as there is underachievement in the school system, the perception that ethnic minorities are consuming more of the economic cake than they contribute will continue.

Some of the facts of inequality in the labour market are frightening but nonetheless real. Only 44 per cent of Bangladeshi people

are economically active as against 68% for the white population. Unemployment rates for Black Caribbean (12 per cent), Black African (14 per cent), Bangladeshi (17 per cent), Pakistani (10 per cent), are substantially higher than for the mainstream white population (5 per cent).

African and Caribbean men are over-represented in the service sector, notably transport and communications at 14 per cent and 18 per cent respectively as compared with 9 per cent for the whole population. Chinese people were more likely to work in the distribution, hotel and restaurant sector (71 per cent) compared to an overall figure of 18 per cent on average. One in eight male Pakistani workers is a taxi driver or chauffeur; the national average is one in 100.

Ethnic minorities are more likely to have lower educational attainment, lower employment rates, are less likely to work in managerial grades and suffer an ethnic penalty of earning, on average, over £100 per week less than white managers. Ethnic minority businesses tend to be under-capitalised, often concentrating on personal and professional services to a captive ethnic market, and almost always in high-risk sectors.

The fact that these inequalities persist, despite several government initiatives, points to a need for structural changes backed by sanctions that have a better likelihood of working. Ethnic minority communities have to be given the opportunity to help devise

non-discriminatory policies that will give them an equal chance to compete at all levels.

There is a dearth of ethnic minorities in corporate boardrooms and public sector organisations that claim to be equal opportunity employers yet refuse to disclose the ethnic mix of their workforce because they also claim to be “colour blind”.

One change is to extend the Amended Race Relations Act 2000 to the entire public, voluntary, community and private sector and require them to develop race equality plans and to undertake periodic equality impact assessments. Another is through targets. The Home Office has targets for the employment promotion and retention of ethnic minority workers providing a baseline from which it can periodically measure its progress.

Contract compliance tried as a bold move by the Greater London Council in the 1980s must be brought back and extended to include positive procurement practices that will encourage more equality.

Implementing some of these measures will enable minority businesses access to mainstream markets that are more lucrative and sustainable, which will enable them to grow and be more competitive. It is only when they are operating at higher levels of turnover and profit that the banks will stop discriminating against lending to black, Asian and minority ethnic people.

Young ethnic minority people must realise that education

followed by acquisition of skills is the only way out of poverty and towards a sustained higher income in the jobs market. The more educated you are, the more choice you have at switching careers and changing jobs.

Education must be backed up with skills and training. The Government, facilitating agencies and the corporate world has to be persuaded to provide work experience positions for black people at all levels.

Whatever happens will need a lot of political will to back it up. The way for ethnic minority people to gain economic parity is through political power, on local councils and as representatives in parliament. Making decisions and introducing policies that will give us an equal share in the economic fortunes of this country.

As one of the greatest African leaders Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah said in his campaign to gain independence for Ghana 50 years ago: “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all others will be added.”

Ade Sawyerr is partner in Equinox Consulting. Provides: consultancy, training, research. Focus: Strategies for black and ethnic minority, disadvantaged and socially excluded communities. He comments on political, economic and social, and development issues. CONTACT: www.equinoxconsulting.net ades@equinoxconsulting.net



New town centre for South-East London

Canada Water will soon be home to a new town centre bringing in the latest community facilities and opportunities for residents.

In what will be the regeneration of the whole area, the new centre will provide hundreds of new jobs, homes and job opportunities, and be home to a new innovative library centre which has already been given planning permission.

Around 900 homes will be built around a civic plaza and will be constructed to be environmentally friendly.



Every pound counts

Lambeth Council has launched a campaign to ensure that vulnerable adults receive enough income to live comfortably.

Every Pound Counts, aimed at older people, people with disabilities or who have illnesses, is a new initiative which could see more than 4,000 residents getting the help and support they need through free benefit advice.

For more information, or to help campaign for vulnerable adults to access more support, visit www.lambeth.gov.uk/everypoundcounts



New Hindu school

Britain's first Hindu State primary school will be built in West London.

Construction of the Krishna-Avanti Primary School in Harrow will start later this year and is expected to open in September 2008.

The new mixed school, supported by the charitable organisation I-Foundation, will, alongside the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), form a spiritual course for the 210 pupils and 26 nursery children it intends to teach. Funded by the charity, a shrine with the Hindu idols of Lord Krishna and his brother Balram will be placed in the centre of the school.



Bangladesh food appeal

The charity Brit Bangla is seeking donations to help those affected by the devastation caused in the South Asian flood earlier this year. More than 25 million people were left homeless, destitute, and many lost their lives as a result of the floods. Shelter, food and medical care are urgently needed for many who are at risk of dengue fever, diarrhoea www.britbangla.net

Ambassador Programme gets under way

The Social Enterprise Ambassadors programme seeks to encourage social innovation by recruiting 20 ambassadors with a flair for business and social enterprise. The programme will recruit 20 individuals who will help promote social and environmental change through business as well as encourage potential entrepreneurs and investors to follow in the same line of social enterprise.

Chinese translate

Chinese-speaking volunteers are helping some of the many disadvantaged migrants in the UK who want to learn English. The Chinese Information and Advice Centre (CIAC) runs a Language Exchange Programme, which assists migrants in helping them integrate into British society. The programme is funded by the Home Office's Refugee Community Development Fund.

For more information visit: www.ciac.co.uk

Project helps disadvantaged youth

CJ's Mediaworkz is a youth project dedicated to helping disadvantaged inner-city youngsters by giving them opportunities to gain a range of skills.

It is a non-profit initiative based in Hoxton, East London, providing education programmes, music courses, youth activities, promoting social enterprise and mentors. Dedicated to improving the lives of inner-city young people, one of its key schemes is its mentoring programme.

By 2008 the project aims to become a "centre of excellence for youth mentoring". For further information visit: www.cjsmediaworkz.com



“He [The Prime Minister] needs to focus on changing the very culture of government so that it works with, not just for, the people.”

Involve

Involve

The participation organisation, Involve, works to put people at the heart of decision-making. In a recent article in the Guardian, Edward Andersson and Richard Wilson of Involve called on the Government to make the public partners in policy-making.

They wrote: "He [Prime Minister] needs to focus on changing the very culture of government so that it works with, not just for, the people. The public is less and less engaged in the public realm. Whether not voting, not attending public forums or simply not trusting their politicians to get on with the job. Britain's democracy suffers from chronic public disinterest. Just 33 per cent of those in the bottom social class feel they can influence government decisions. Those involved in decision-making are still mostly middle-class, middle-aged, male and white." For further information, visit www.involve.org.uk.

Civic and Political Engagement News

London Councils, a consortium of 32 London boroughs, the City of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, has recently submitted proposals to the Roberts Commission setting out a number of practical measures to make the role of councillor more attractive to a wider range of Londoners.

The organisation linked the lack of engagement from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities with the ballot box to the profile of the city's elected representatives.

As the current inquiry by the Commission on the role of local councillors, headed by former Camden Council leader Dame Jane Roberts, made clear, the "typical" councillor today is still most likely to be white, male and over 50 years old.

London Councils, together with Capital Ambition, has commissioned a scoping project to examine the potential for a campaign to run up to the 2010 elections to attract candidates from a wider diversity of backgrounds.

For further information, visit www.londoncouncils.gov.uk.

Healthy Cities

Newcastle Community Empowerment Network runs courses to provide skills and approaches for managing community conflict and promoting community cohesion.

The organisation works at a regional level to support the BME voluntary and community groups to network, support each other, share experiences and resources and to influence decision-making and policy.

For further information contact Satpal Parmar, Newcastle Healthy Cities Project, on 0191 211 3588 or email satpal@ncen.org.uk.



RACE *Roulette?*

Without a statutory committee will the EHRC competently address race discrimination issues?
asks Lisa Gregoire

A Black British baby born today is more likely to go on to receive poor quality education, be paid less, live in substandard housing, be in poor health and discriminated against in other ways than his or her white counterparts and black and other minority ethnic (BME) communities have little confidence that things will change with the recent introduction of the single equalities body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

Confidence is low within the BME community over the ability of the EHRC, which was launched in October, to make an explicit commitment to the creation of an integrated Britain, where inequality is rooted out and active civic participation by people from all backgrounds is encouraged, as set out by the former equality watchdog, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in its final policy report, *A lot Done, A lot to Do: our Vision for an Integrated Britain*, published recently.

The EHRC, existed in shadow form since late 2006 following Trevor Phillips' appointment as chair, replaced the CRE, Disability Rights Commission, and the Equal Opportunities Commission, and assumes responsibility for tackling all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, age, sexual orientation, gender and religion or belief, and encouraging compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998.



Trevor Phillips:
equality is about everyone's interest



Lee Jasper:
not convinced



Milena Buyum:
EHRC back stepping

Despite calls to the Government by more than 400 individuals and representative organisations that serve minority ethnic communities to establish a statutory race committee and guarantee minority ethnic representation amongst the commissioners, in addition to providing adequate funding for race-related issues, the Commission has been left without a specific focus on race equality and inadequate BME representation on the board. There are currently three black commissioners, Trevor Phillips and political writer Ziauddin Sardar who is largely responsible for developing good relations between communities of all ethnicities and backgrounds and Kay Hampton, a non-permanent member who is responsible for

CRE transition issues related. The Commission's expected budget of £70m exceeds those of its predecessors put together and the Government argues that it will be able to pool expertise in tackling discrimination and more effectively address multiple forms of inequality.

Soon after the EHRC launch and in response to the public discontent EHRC chair Trevor Phillips told OBV: "The new Commission provides us with an opportunity to reshape the debate around equality and human rights: equality is not just about special interests, it is in everyone's interest." He believes the Commission will have a "unified mandate" of a strong commitment to promote human rights, and added: "We are here to stand up for those principles and ensure that as far as is possible they are what guides the way that we treat each other, and the way that society as a whole treats us."

However, like many, the Mayor of London's senior equalities advisor, Lee Jasper - who protested vehemently against the abolition of the CRE - is not convinced. He said: "The fact is, when race equality initiatives are merged into general equality initiatives then race equality loses its priority. The advances that we have made and secured in the UK in the post-war period are now in danger of being lost. Not even under a Thatcher government would it have been conceived as appropriate to abolish the CRE, particularly when racial discrimination is so rife in Britain. Without the engagement of BME communities the EHRC will be a disaster for race equality in the UK."

The EHRC is part of a wider drive by the Government to simplify equality law. The department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) produced a green paper in June as a prelude to legislation to streamline current laws. It proposed ditching requirements for public bodies to "have due regard" to promoting racial equality. This provision is designed to ensure bodies take account of the race implications of all they do, by carrying out equality impact assessments of its' policies.

Legal action against 15 government departments, initiated by the CRE earlier this year, is based on their failures to carry out adequate race impact assessments on many of their policies.

Milena Buyum, vice-chair of the National Assembly Against Racism, has accused the CLG of watering down existing duties on public bodies to promote race equality and weakening the legal force at the disposal of the EHRC.

She said: "What we are going to end up with is legislation that is not going to be enforceable, which would be a backward step. Legislation must include very strong enforceable measures to promote equality in order to move away from discrimination and towards more equality in our society."

Public life Profile

How can a board member influence an organisation? And is it important to have BME members on a board?

Vernon Smith
Independent Monitoring Board for Feltham Prison

A lot of people voice their opinions from the outside, but people on the inside don't tend to listen. Being on the inside, you can see what is going on and have a part in changing it.

My role on the board is to monitor what goes on in the prison. That means making sure that all prisoners are treated fairly. A board member's influence is dependant on how effectively they can get their points across.

Some people complain that it doesn't make a difference, but I think it does. As long as you are prepared to monitor a situation that you feel is wrong and you keep hammering the need to change it, then it will be changed.

Maxine James
King's College Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

A board member ought to be able to ensure that policies are in place to see that the organisation operates in a transparent and fair way, so that customers of that organisation are valued. Whether this happens will also depend on how effective the chair is, what goes on within the board and the attitude of the board member.

I'm very concerned about the equality of opportunity for people who work in the NHS. This is why I believe it is critical to have representation of different ethnic groups on the board, although what we have to recognise is that one person on a board cannot represent all the BME communities. It does, however, go some way to saying that that person will be in touch with some of the experiences of the community from which they come.

A Heart for Politics?

Marcia Dixon looks at how black churches in the UK are becoming more politically active by learning from their American counterparts

In 1955, Rev Martin Luther King Jnr, achieved nationwide fame when he mobilised the black community in Montgomery, a town in America's Deep South, to boycott the bus system because of its racist practices. As a result of the community's united action, the buses in Montgomery became fully integrated in December 1956.

The following year saw the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the organisation that was at the forefront of America's fight for black civil rights. Revd King was its first president and the SCLC was committed to non-violent civil disobedience in trying to achieve its aims. The resulting actions enabled black America to make great strides in the civil rights and equality campaign.

Rev Martin Luther King, Rev Jesse Jackson and Bishop TD Jakes are some of the black American church leaders who, during the past 50 years, have entered the political arena with the aim of advancing the cause of black people.

Rev Jesse Jackson took up the baton as a successor to Martin Luther King. He was active in SCLC, went on to found Operation

PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) in 1971 and has built an international reputation in the political campaign for social and civil rights – a campaign as much about improving political representation as building economic strength. In 1994 Rev Jackson became the first black church leader to enter the race to become president when he sought nomination as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

While Rev Jackson represents church leaders who learnt their political skills during the civil rights era, there's a new breed of politically engaged black church leaders such as Bishop TD Jakes, TV evangelist and leader of mega-church, the Potters House in Dallas, Texas.

Bishop Jakes' political message, if it can be called that, is one of personal empowerment. Through his massive empire, which includes books, films and TV broadcasts, he encourages black people to take responsibility for their lives and to be active in all spheres of society, including politics. He spoke out against the treatment of black people in New Orleans during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and is among the select band of black church

leaders who are regularly invited to the White House.

Another campaigning church man is Baptist minister Rev Al Sharpton. Ordained a Pentecostal at the age of nine and re-baptised a Baptist in 1994, Rev Sharpton is renowned as a civil rights campaigner and has made many attempts for elected office.

The 2008 presidential candidate Barack Obama continues the tradition of mixing church and politics. Despite having a Muslim-raised, confessed atheist father, Obama was baptised into the Trinity United Church of Christ in his twenties when he came to understand "the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change." Obama wrote of his Christian belief saying he realised "that religious commitment did not require me to suspend political thinking and disengage from the battle for economic and social justice, or otherwise retreat from the world that I knew and loved". On his campaign trail Obama is equally at home in church or banquet hall and comfortably borrows from the story-telling gospel tradition.

Unlike their US counterparts, Britain's church leaders do not yet have a background

in political activism, but they are increasingly beginning to accept that politics cannot be exorcised from community. Over the past decade the church community here has begun to see the all-round benefits of developing economic stability and a

“religious commitment did not require me to suspend political thinking and disengage from the battle for economic and social justice.”

Barack Obama

strong political voice. This desire is partly driven by burgeoning societal ills and as a response to the achievements of their black American counterparts as they continue the civil rights fight.

In 2005 the leaders of Britain's two largest black Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God of Prophecy and the New Testament Church of God, pledged

to work together to combat the pressing social issues of family breakdown, gun crime, educational underachievement and the impact of the criminal justice system on black people.

While in Tony Blair's Cabinet, Baroness Amos held quarterly meetings with black church leaders across the denominational spectrum, which continues under Minister for Skills, David Lammy. The Mayor of London's race advisor, Lee Jasper, regularly address church leaders' events to encourage and stoke the political fires, and in September Rev Jesse Jackson met with some of Britain's most powerful black church leaders to kick-start a new political church agenda.

Raising bold, courageous and confident leaders is second nature to the church; so the challenge, as Barack Obama found, is not for the church to retreat from the world but to seek to invest its talents in it. And black British church leaders now recognise that helping to rid society of the evils which surface in areas such as gun crime, educational underachievement, poverty and racism lies not only in moral imperative but also in having a defined political agenda.



Martin Luther King mobilised the black community

A Heart for Politics?

Continued...



Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin
Chair of Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns

Politics is about people. The church therefore does not have the luxury to say that "we should not be involved". Jesus was often the "politician", creating changes in people's lives. We need to get out of our buildings and be where the people are. There we will see what is needed and together we will make a difference. I believe the church is actually at the heart of the local community. Long after other agencies have locked up shop and gone home. We are often called upon to represent members of the community to outside agencies, eg, the council, police, social services, etc.

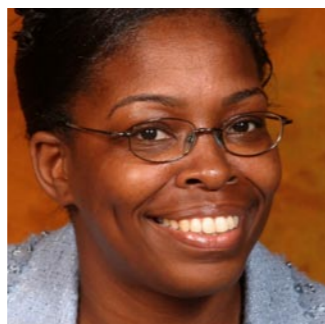


Rev David Shosanya
Missions Director
London Baptist Association

The church's involvement in politics is a controversial issue. Distinctions have been made between politics with a "big P" and politics with a "little P". My view is that the role of the church is to offer critical perspectives about the moral and practical implications of political actions as well as to offer credible practical alternatives and possibilities to those tasked with the governance of society. Whether this is seen to be the church getting involved in politics obstructively or doing what God has called her to do is open for debate. I personally feel it is the church doing what she is called to do.

"The fact that black communities have some of the lowest voting levels in the UK (turnout at the 2001 general election was 35% among black voters, compared with 54% among whites) should be a major concern for black church leaders"

Dr. R. David Muir



Katei Kirby
General Secretary
African Caribbean
Evangelical Alliance

The church can and does contribute to local community in a number of ways - from simply being present and accessible in a community to directly delivering a practical service that meets the community needs. However, simply responding to an issue or concern is not enough. The church has greater impact through its proactive involvement in, and deliberate engagement with, the institutions and structures through which community decisions are made.

The view that church and politics should not mix is changing, and changing fast. There are Biblical examples like Nehemiah, who was seconded to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, to conduct a census, and to restore the confidence of a nation; and more recent examples like the late Dr Martin Luther King, whose dream impacted the civil and human rights agenda worldwide. The wind of change that galvanised Christians to rise up together to abolish slave trade legislation, to expose segregation and to remove apartheid, is still blowing. Christians are demonstrating their commitment to change both by running innovative and creative programmes and by becoming decision-makers - governors, councillors, MPs - themselves. I think that it is important that the church is proactive and deliberate about its political engagement and involvement. The challenge is to encourage that without becoming party political.



Dr. R. David Muir
Executive Director: Public
Policy (Evangelical Alliance)

The church has always contributed to the local and wider community. At times it's been criticised for focusing too much on its own internal politics, spirituality and self-understanding at the expense of engaging with urgent social and political issues. However, today black Christians are much more engaged with some of the big questions which preoccupy all of us, namely, education, youth crime, nihilism, family breakdown and community cohesion. I see encouraging signs of engagement in the black majority churches and the wider black Christian leadership, with central and local government and other key agencies, to tackle a wide range of public policy issues. Although there will always be a tiny minority who question the role of the church in politics, the church's role here is crucial. The church is at its best "politically", when it functions as an agent of social and spiritual transformation, mediating grace, hope and love. The fact that black communities have some of the lowest voting levels in the UK (turnout at the 2001 general election was 35% among black voters, compared with 54% among whites) should be a major concern for black church leaders. The church has a significant role to play in shaping modern politics and informing social policies.

The Black Christian Leaders' Forum (leaders and representatives of large denominations and organisations) regularly meets with government ministers to address public policy concerns facing the black community. I see this new development as a significant factor in ensuring that the voice of black Christians is heard in government.

The GOOD Samaritans

Civic engagement is an effective route to improve communities and influence society. Two organisations are practicing what they preach

BLACK BOYS CAN

One church that has taken note of the furore surrounding the educational underachievement of black boys is the Church of God of Prophecy.

In 2002 the Church of God of Prophecy helped launch The National Black Boys Can Association, an organisation that provides practical educational support to young black boys.

At its start, five years ago in Birmingham, the project was staffed by volunteers from the Church of God of Prophecy, one of Britain's oldest and largest black denominations.

But from humble beginnings The National Black Boys Can Association has grown to become a thriving, independent organisation with 23 franchises situated throughout the country giving educational support to 1,000 black boys to help them succeed in the educational system. It also works in 25 schools, and has three strategic partners at Oxford, Birmingham and Stafford University.

Black Boys Can takes a three-pronged approach, working with boys, their parents and directly with schools and universities.

Steven Brooks, national network development manager for the organisation explained: "We focus on their academic progress and core subjects on the school curriculum and on personal development, which looks at a pupil's attitude, behaviour and aspiration."

Due to the success Black Boys Can has experienced in raising educational achievement the organisation is regularly invited into schools to work with boys that are underachieving. And in their work with universities, regular open days are organised, so both boys and their parents are aware of what is required to get on to a degree course.

There's no doubt that Black Boys Can is successful. Boys who go through their programme have a pass rate of 60% (i.e., 60% get 5 GCSEs or more) compared to the national average of 24%.

James is typical of the kind of successes this innovative project is experiencing. When he joined Black Boys Can in 1999

he was totally disengaged from education. His parents had to force him to join the project, and during the first few weeks he showed no interest in the activities. Several weeks into the programme, however, he began to improve and take part in the discussions. Such was the improvement in James attitude towards education, that he received an award at his school for being one of 20 students who had made the greatest improvement educationally. He left school with 10 GCSEs.

Aside from working directly with boys, schools and universities, Black Boys Can is seeking to increase its influence on education at a policy level. The organisation has worked on several policy documents including Getting It Right, which looked at exclusion. The report concluded that schools were 'unwittingly racist' and that black boys were at a disadvantage because of racism and the lack of aspiration teachers have for black male pupils.

Black Boys Can's plans for the future are ambitious. They hope to establish an academy school in Birmingham, which should open in 2009 and to continue shaping public policy.

The organisation continues to play a role in setting the agenda for the education of black boys and is busy planning an education conference which will take place on November 13 2007 at Renewal Conference Centre in Solihull.

Contact: <mailto:blackboyscan@hotmail.com>
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Telephone: 0121 358 8618



STREET PASTORS

Street Pastors was founded by Rev Les Isaac in January 2003 in the aftermath of the New Year shooting of four teenage girls, two of whom died, at a party in Birmingham.

The tragedy made national headlines and brought home the urgent need to tackle inner-city gun crime. Deeply concerned about the rising crime and violence in urban areas, Rev Isaac embarked on a black-majority church tour with Rev David Shosanya and Detective Constable Ian Crichtlow to raise awareness of gun crime and discuss church strategies on how to combat it.

The tour culminated in Rev Isaac's call for church members to become Street Pastors. He received a great response and the first team sent out to patrol Hackney and Brixton in May 2003 was a big hit with the public.

Since then the team has grown to more than 1,000 trained Street Pastors, operating in 11 towns and cities throughout the UK. The project has been launched in Antigua and Barbuda with interest for the scheme from as far afield as Pakistan and Switzerland.

The patrolling Pastors have broken up fights, stopped crimes and saved lives. In some boroughs the police have noted a fall in crime when Street Pastors are on patch.

Rev Isaac is not surprised by its success. "Many Christians want to use their faith in a practical way to help people. Many people, both young and old are just sitting on their church soaking in the words of their preachers, but deep down in their hearts they want to share God's love with others. Street Pastors is a practical way for them to do so."

"The church has a message of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, and is morally bankrupt if it is not presenting a holistic gospel. Street Pastors is successful for several reasons. It's presenting the gospel message in a practical way. It is helping the community - uniting the church, local government and police - and they tell us so."

As with many church-based initiatives, Street Pastors experiences funding challenges, but as long there's a need, Rev Isaac and his team will continue patrolling the streets to bring hope and provide a listening ear to young people and help those at risk.

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Telephone: 020 7771 9770



More Harm Than Good

The 2007 Mental Health Act's impact on Black Britain

Very few people are aware that the biggest changes in mental health law in over 25 years were passed by Parliament this summer and will have a direct impact on a large numbers of black families in the UK. Writes Matilda MacAttram

While October saw a series of events set up to mark Mental Health Awareness Week, the treatment and care of most mental health patients is unlikely to see any improvement as plans are put in place to roll out the hugely unpopular changes within the new 2007 Mental Health Act.

The contentious new Act received royal assent this July after the Government sidelined all the concerns raised by black professionals and human rights groups over the adverse impact proposals in the new law will have on ethnic minorities and people from the African Caribbean community in particular.

While the furore over the hugely unpopular 2007 Mental Health has by no means died down there is increasing concern among grassroots groups that very few people within the community are aware of how changes will affect how people are treated under the new law.

A report by the medical journal, The Lancet, published just days after the Act was passed, revealed many mental health wards may be doing more harm than good. Mental health services have destroyed a generation of black

Britons, given the statistical evidence in the Count Me In censuses of 2005 and 2006.

Ethnic minorities have historically associated mental health services with compulsion. People from African Caribbean backgrounds are 18 times more likely to be sectioned under the old 1983 Mental Health Act. People of African heritage are more likely to be misdiagnosed, over-medicated, forcibly restrained and placed in seclusion despite having similar rates of mental ill health as other ethnic groups.

A public inquiry into the tragic death of David 'Rocky' Bennett, an African Caribbean patient in mental health care, brought the institutional racism within the service to the nation's attention. Bennett died after being forcibly restrained by a five-strong team of mental health nurses for almost half an hour while at the Norvic Clinic, which is part of the Norfolk, Suffolk & Cambridgeshire Health Authority. Community leaders are concerned that the 2007 Mental Health Act, is likely to increase such tragedies.

The virulent racism within mental health services has led to a crisis in black mental health with black people now making up 40 per

A public inquiry into the tragic death of David 'Rocky' Bennett, an African Caribbean patient in mental health care, brought the institutional racism within the service to the nation's attention



Details of the changes to the new 2007 Mental Health Act are as follows:

THE MAIN AMENDMENTS OF CONCERN:

Community Treatment Orders. This is a new provision which gives practitioners the power to force people to take medicine they do not want at home and could restrict where they live and what they can do.

The definition of mental illness has been broadened to include people with personality disorders, who under the 1983 Act could not be forced into hospital.

New increased powers will be given to non-medical staff, such as nurses and occupational therapists, to keep people in hospital against their will.

People will no longer have to be considered "treatable" before they can be detained and medicated.

A patient will only have the right to an independent advocate after detention.



cent of people detained in high secure psychiatric hospitals despite being less than 3 per cent of the national population.

The Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody's annual report, published last month, showed that there were 523 deaths in prisons and mental health settings in the past 12 months. Over half of these were in Mental Health Act detention.

This shocking revelation has raised alarm bells about the health and welfare of those forcibly detained against their will and has led to calls for strategies to equip families on how to keep their loved ones out of a system that is clearly not helping to improve their health.

While campaign groups like Black Mental Health UK are looking at strategies which can best keep the community informed about these developments there are still calls from many quarters to see the new Mental Health Act amended again to ensure the death toll of patients does not continue to rise.

Matilda MacAttram
Director, Black Mental Health UK.
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Catch21 is the UK's first political Internet television channel based at Westminster – run by young people, for young people. Whenever you have a question, comment or view that you want heard we'll make sure it happens, right here, in the heart of power.

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OBV

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Sign up on line at:
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Have you ever participated in an OBV programme? YES NO



DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A MAGISTRATE?

A series of free Operation Black Vote & Ministry of Justice one-day seminars titled 'A judiciary for all' will be held in regions across the country.

If you are interested in becoming a magistrate this is your invitation to sign up to attend.

The Magistrate Shadowing Scheme seminars will provide individuals who are considering applying to become a magistrate with the knowledge and understanding about the role of magistrates.

Participants will have the opportunity to judge sample cases, discuss the application process and learn about the work of the Criminal Justice System.

In addition to the Birmingham and Liverpool seminars, which have already taken place, four more will be held in February and March 2008 in the following areas Manchester, Bradford, Cardiff and Doncaster/Sheffield.



TO REQUEST A BOOKING FORM PLEASE VISIT:

The Operation Black Vote website: www.obv.org.uk

Telephone: 0208 983 5430

or E-mail: mag@obv.org.uk

(Quote 'Regional Seminars' in the subject field.)