At a meeting held on Tuesday 20th January 1981 at the Pagnell Street Centre, some 100 people unanimously decided that a Fact Finding Commission should be set up. To put it shortly the setting up of the Commission was a vote of non-confidence in the way they were dealing with this grave tragedy and to counter the deliberately misleading statements in the press.

That Commission published its preliminary finding at a public meeting attended by in excess of 1500 people on Sunday 25th January 1981. The following is a summary of their findings.

On Saturday 17th January 1981 at 43 New Cross Street, Yvonne Ruddock whose birthday it was, had organised a party jointly with a friend Angela Jackson. The party started late at approximately midnight due to the delayed arrival of those who were providing the music. From all accounts the party was well ordered and enjoyed by the young people there. There were no arguments or fights and as Mrs Ruddock, Yvonne’s mother stated there was a limited amount of alcohol as she did not want any of the children to go home drunk.

On two occasions the police attended the house. On the second visit they advised Mrs Ruddock to close the curtains on one of the upper floors. The party was being held upstairs and the front room had been designated out of bounds to the party goers. It was in that room that the fire began, which raged like a volcano through the house, started.

WHAT WERE THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE FIRE?

Some time before 5.45 a.m. on 18th January, a white man was observed to drive around the building 5 or 6 times. Shortly afterwards a white Princess car started a white woman unknown to those at the party entered the house and enquired whose property it was. She was then seen to go into the area outside 439. She carried two bags, was approximately 23 years of age and was later seen outside as the fire raged. A white man was also seen outside the building at the time of the fire.

A young man who had been at the party stated that he left the party at about 5.45 a.m. and walked towards New Cross Station. When he reached the Railway Bridge he turned around and looked in the direction of the house. When his brother who had stopped to talk to a young lady was coming. At the police they noticed a man (but cannot say if he was black or white) standing outside 439. There was a white Princess motor car parked at the kerb. The engine was running as he could see fumes coming from the exhaust. He noticed the man and legends made a throwing action and simultaneously heard the sound of breaking glass. The man then walked around to the driver’s side of the princess and got into it. The car which had been facing Deptford manoeuvred a U-turn and sped off down Morning Road.

Amputated those who were inside the house was Mr Leslie Morris, one of the five or so ‘adults’ at the party. He stated that he had been in the kitchen and was on his way to the front room when he heard someone shout fire, he went to the front room and found it ablaze, the whole building he said had burned out, in 3 to 5 minutes, maybe 10 minutes. Mrs Ruddock states and has always maintained that when she looked into the room after the shout of fire she noticed an armchair over by the window on fire, the curtains were on fire, she does not recall however at that stage fire in the centre of the room.

The police through their enquiries are releasing information which tends to show that the fire started from inside. They answer the statement police were claiming that the fire started in a room of the building and was fuelled by paint thinners.

From the enquiries of the Fact Finding Commission they have discounted the following lines of police enquiry:

(a) That a faulty television may have exploded.
(b) That a spark from a gas fire had ignited a pouffe.
(c) That someone smoking cannabis may have been careless.
(d) That an abundance of alcohol may have been present.
(e) That gatecrashers who had been turned away returned and caused the fire.

Those witnesses including Mrs Ruddock, who had spoken to, or have been present when gatecrashers were spoken to, concluded there was no animosity.

Those young people had no inkling as to who had gatecrashed selves that some.

THIRTEEN YOUNG PEOPLE SNUFFED OUT WHEN THE LIVE FOR. THEY WERE

Andrew Gooding (14),  Patricia Johnson (15) Owen Thompson (16) Yvonne Ruddock (16) Steve Collins (17) Peter Campbell (18) Paul Ruddock (22)

The Official Reaction

The murder of 13 black youngsters has stirred in the ranks of the mass media and those in the 'acceptable' political parties of this country and the government less concerned than that over the death of dogs. The media were very quickly on the scene outside 439 New Cross Road, SE14. They spared no time in attempting to sow the seeds of confusion with statements such as flight in party may have been the cause for the fire, or that it could have been gatecrashers. They were very quick to publish the standard police line that there was no racial motive. It seems that whenever black people are attacked or killed precisely because of racist activity the police state that there was no racial motive.

Apart from the news bulletins on radio and television on 18 January 1981 and a few lines in some of the national papers on Monday 19 January 1981, there has been a drought of information. The carrions of Fleet St and those associated with it have shut their blood filled pens, black death for them is of little or no significance.

Neither one member of this Govt. nor one from the Opposition has heeded the cries of Black children in their hour of peril. The MP for the area, John Silkin who has offices less than a petrol bomb away has said nothing.

We sympathize with the families of those who have recently suffered a similar tragedy. We cannot however avoid the obvious analogy. There were no telegrams to the families of Black children burnt to death in New Cross from the Queen, nor from Margaret Thatcher. The New Cross Tragedy has received no Official response for a Public Enquiry, or a National Day of Mourning. Not even a simple note of sympathy.
13 DEAD AND 27 INJURED

Two Views Of a Tragedy

The following are extracts, firstly from the service delivered by the Rev. Canon Wilfred Wood at the funeral service for Yvonne and Paul Ruddock. Secondly by Mrs Sybil Phoenix, at a press conference held on Thursday 11th February 1981.

Rev. W. Wood.

"From time to time, someone is murdered because he is representative of something that someone else wants to destroy. It would be unrealistic if we did not ask ourselves if these young people were not murdered because someone wanted to destroy what they represent. Those who die are representative of all of us. The terror by night, the bullet by day, the sickness that destroys even in the daytime which struck down Paul and Yvonne and eleven others, can strike any of us, anywhere, anywhere, there is no point in being afraid.

If we do not speak for ourselves, the people who murder young black people will assume that they are speaking for us: what is more, they would be right, for public opinion would be on their side, since public opinion is not what people think, but only that portion of their thoughts that they express. Is the conventional wisdom that things will get better as time passes more conventional than wise?

So there is need for all of us openly and actively to declare where we stand in relation to those who murder innocent people - irrespective of whether these murderers are our neighbours, relations, friends, kith or kin. If we do not come out openly against them, then they are proved right in their assumptions that we are their partners in their evil actions. We must not be afraid.

Mrs. S. Phoenix

At a press conference held at the Moonshinet Club in Pagwell Street, in an emotional speech Mrs. Sybil Phoenix, a supporter of Mrs. Ruddock and other parents who have lost their children in the fire, called for more support from the authorities. She said: "If a dogs home was attacked and 12 dogs burned the press would ask 'how could dogs be treated this way?' She said that 'some­time ago a kennel was burnt down and a surviving kitten made the news for days, yet we have a situation where black people have been murdered and to date there has not even been any messages of sympathy from the Prime Minister of this country.'

The Hate Letters

Following this tragic event and the insensitiveness of the addressees of those who died, in the South London Press, the families of those who died received their first hate letter.

The letters were to be sent to the addresses of the parents of the black children who died in the New Cross fire, and were printed in the press. Each of the letters carried the addressee 61 Chaucer Road, Herne Hill, S.E.24 and the signature Brian Bunting.

The letters were then received at the offices of the White Indi­an Alliance, after they had been published.

"What a great day last Sunday when I heard about the fire and all those nigger going up in flames great me and my mates went to the pub for a good drink and a good girl and the police told us about the fire they said great I hope the black b... who muged me was there (like the black mon­key who will mug you) the day that all the black filth is sent back to Africa we street trader is tough.

"What a pity only 12 stinking niggers died I've seen in MacDonalds they are offering Roast Nigger Burgers at a Spe­cial price if you take 2. The guy who threw the bomb is really slick he says that he only got 12 to the allition Better luck next time.

We are aware that there are always one or two who are concerned about Black people being murdered. We must at all times be wary of the ways in which this State works and be prepared to counter it at every level. We must not allow ourselves to be lull into not reacting especially in such grave matters as the lives of our Youths.

Political necessity is a hard mas­ter. It is that master which has ordered the silence of the 'great' Brit­ish journalist.
1

2nd March 1981 at Fordham Park New Cross
Black People from all over the country
gathered in the rain to start a historic
12-mile protest march against Black
Peoples' treatment in Britain.

KNOWING YOUR ENEMIES

JANUARY 18th: An unprecedented attack
against Black youths took place at 439
New Cross Road, killing 8 and seriously
injuring 35 others. The total deaths
were to eventually reach THIRTEEN.

JANUARY 17th: The
Sun front page read: '9 Die In Firebomb
House'. The story then went on to ex-
plain about noisy, overcrowded party
with gas masks, and
Police looking for a coloured man
in a white Austin
Future. The News was also repeated by
the general media.

BLACK PEOPLE DECIDE THEIR HISTORY BY
THEIR COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

JANUARY 21st: Local
Black people at the scene of the Mass
Murder decided to have a meeting to
discuss the serious
implications of what took
place, especially the unfair
and inaccurate reporting of the
media.

News of the meeting spread mainly by
word-of-mouth, there was an unpresidented
turnout. At the meeting accounts of what took
place strongly contradicted the report-
ing in media. The person who was quoted
as saying he saw a coloured man driving
in a white car, strongly denied making such a state-
ment. The atmosphere of the party was said
to be idyllic and orderly.

A white man was seen to be driving around regularly by the
House. People felt that their community lived in con-
stant threat of terror because of known Black men who attacks in the area. The fire-
men and police who had arrived at the scene stated that this fire had the
hallmark of a firebomb attack.

BLACK ASSEMBLY

With this background the Black Peoples' Assembly formed the
New Cross Massacre Action Committee, alongside the Fact Finding
Commission to investigate the finer details and to ensure that
the community was correctly informed rather than being
fed distorted news from the State.
In January 1971 at a house in Sunderland Road, Forest Hill, South East London, a group of black people had gathered to celebrate the New Year. But what was to be a Party an occasion of celebration ended in horror and tragedy. In the early hours of the Sunday morning a gang of arsonists, hell bent on the furthering of their racist motive, lobbed petrol bombs into the room where the party was being held. Miraculously there were no fatalities, several persons however were severely burnt and disfigured for life.

Almost ten years to the day on the 18th January 1981 at a similar occasion of celebration this time a young girls 16th birthday party was being celebrated. The venue was in New Cross Road, London SE14, no more than three miles from Sunderland road. We all know or should know what happened in New Cross that fearful morning. On the morning of what has come to be known as the New Cross Massacre Thirteen black youths ranging in age from 14 to 22 years all lost their lives. Out of that thirteen nine (9) died instantly the other four (4) died later in hospitals.

In 1971 at the time of the Sunderland Road bombings the police and other organs of the state carried out a deliberate campaign to hoodwink the community, locally and nationally. They attempted to do the same thing concerning New Cross. In 1971 the Home Office issues to the "gentlemen of Fleet Street" a D notice which though not obligatory they abided by and did not publicize the events. In 1981 they attempted by all means fair and foul to lay the blame for the Massacre at the door of a black person or anyone else but a racist faction.

The state has summoned together a maggoty rat infested group of so-called experts and investigators, Scientific and otherwise. This they did in order to add substance to their theories, namely:-

1) That the fire was an accident.
2) That it was caused by one or more of those who died.
3) That it was caused by one or more of those who survived.
4) That it was a combination of 2&3 above.

The entire police "investigation" was concentrated to prove one of the above and to disprove any possibility of a racist attack. They failed miserably on both counts. But in the process the police were responsible for spreading some very inhumane and malicious rumours.

Unlike 1971 where they effectively supressed information about the Sunderland Road bombings. They were unable to do so over New Cross. Certain sections of the black community who had been involved since Sunderland Road in a decade of political struggles, were experienced enough and capable of coming to grips with the situation. Without those activists New Cross may well have been no more than another peg on the analysis sheet or an inquest before the High Court. We are optimistic that we will get a new inquest.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.

The Massacre Action Committee had hoped that the Commission would have been able to sit in January 1982. Unfortunately that was not possible for various reasons the most important being trouble in obtaining a suitable venue and certain of the Commissioners being unable to attend at that time. We are now working to get the Commission off the ground in June of 82. For any further information about either the appeal or Commission of Inquiry contact the NCMAC at 169, Railton Road, London S.E. 24. or Tel-737-2268.

THORNTON HEATH TRIALS

THORNTON HEATH CONT'D

NOTES

Walter Birks White & Co. Affirm

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE MURDERS AT NEW CROSS 1971

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Balliol College, University of Oxford

John Hemming, General Secretary

Mr. Peter Gurney, National Co-ordinator

Mr. Peter Butlin

Mr. Peter Chamberlain

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