

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BLACK SUPPORT?

We still need our community organisations, argues Ade Sawyer

THE FIFTIES, sixties, and seventies saw mass migration of black people from the Caribbean into this country in search of work. Though some left after several years to enjoy the fruits of their labour 'back home', a sizeable number stayed to help build this country.

Their entry into the UK was at a time when there were no anti-discrimination laws, and they needed support mechanisms to enable them to settle and manage in this different and sometimes hostile environment. They, therefore, set up community organisations to provide that support to families and keep their community together.

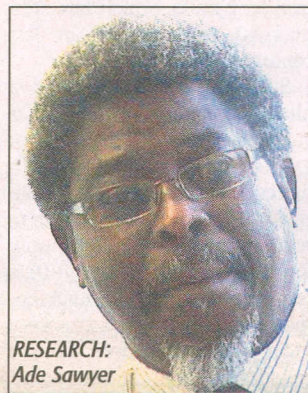
Organisations such as the Joint Council of Caribbean Organisations, West Indian Standing Conference and even business organisations such as the UK Caribbean Chamber of Commerce were once vibrant national organisations. But at the local and metropolitan levels there were several functioning organisations that acted as umbrellas to supplement what the mainstream services provided to the African Caribbean community. These organisations pro-

vided services in welfare, housing, education, health and social care, and even went on to provide for entertainment and economic needs.

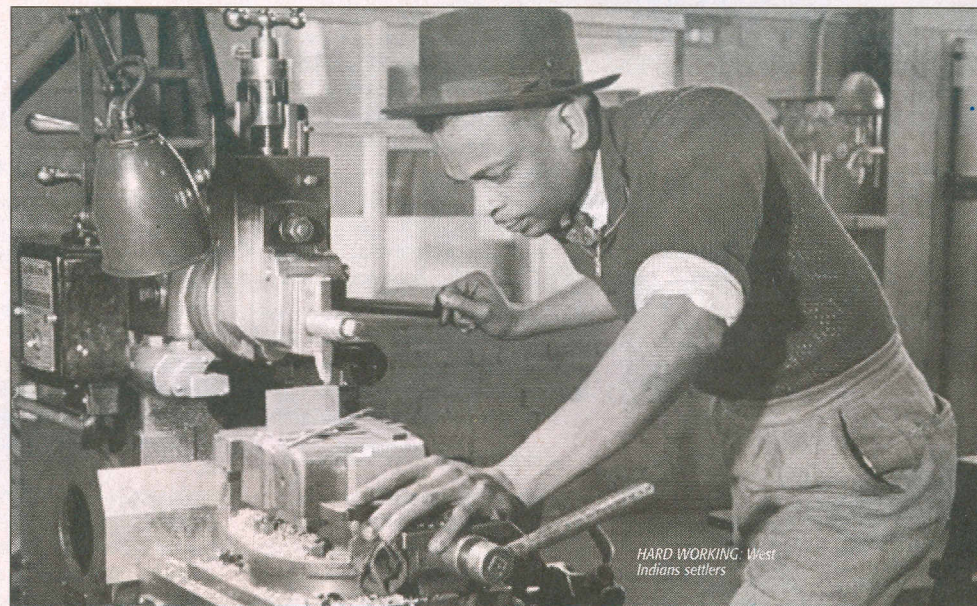
DYING

Sadly, these African Caribbean community organisations are dying a slow death; they can now no longer keep the community together.

All the problems that they were set up to assist with are coming back. Educational underachievement is an issue, and gangs and gun crime is now prevalent. Statutory organisations cannot solve these problems on their own. The government needs the African Caribbean community organisations to assist – and



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so do second and third generation black Britons – but they are nowhere to be found.

They are under attack from themselves, from the funders and local authorities, from the government, and from their own communities.

The Government is now pushing very hard for a British identity. Black Minority Ethnic (BME) has now become Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). Why can it not be African Caribbean

Asian and Minority Ethnic (ACAME)? African Caribbean organisations may have lost their identity by being subsumed in BME.

Also, the organisations may not have been managed as effectively as they could have been – internal strife, lack of skills, and informal instead of professional management principles are among the problems. This has meant that some have not been able to hold up under the scrutiny

most community organisations that receive public funding now face.

As funding regimes and priorities have changed, there is very little grant funding going to community groups now, especially to welfare organisations from settled communities. The African Caribbean community is seen as settled, and to a large extent even integrated. Funds are more likely to be available to organisations that have a sec-

tor focus – for instance in education, health, arts, housing, or community safety.

As many African Caribbean VCOs (voluntary and community organisations) tend to be generic, they miss out on most of these opportunities.

To get the African Caribbean community back on track, we need our community organisations. If we cannot get them back, at least we need to know what lessons are to be learnt from their demise.

Not to do so will deny the second, third, and further generations of African Caribbean people in the UK (who are now proud 'black British') the same supportive environment that we created for ourselves, when we first emigrated here.

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