



## **Crime, order and social control**

### *The killing of Stephen Lawrence*

#### **V/O:**

He was 18 years old. A bright young man studying for his 'A' levels and determined to become an architect. He died at the side of a leafy suburban avenue with blood pouring from stab wounds. The incident won little coverage in the national media, but those who mourn him say the killing is just the latest in a series. Stephen Lawrence was murdered simply because he was black.

It was 10.30 at night two weeks ago and Stephen was waiting at this bus stop on his way home when five or six young white men came across the road. Although one shouted a racial taunt, Stephen didn't run. Then without any provocation the youths stabbed and beat him. As he lay bleeding a friend tried to stop a car for help but even in this middle class area, no-one did. He bled to death before he reached hospital.

#### **DOREEN LAWRENCE:**

The back of his head, he had an iron bar across his head, he's got a hole in his neck and it's a butcher's knife they used, they didn't use a flick knife or a small knife, it's a butcher's knife.

#### **NEVILLE LAWRENCE:**

It went into his lungs – from up here it went straight down into his lungs.

#### **DOREEN LAWRENCE:**

So he's had that and on his arm.

#### **NEVILLE LAWRENCE:**

The knife went through his arm, right through to the other side and into his side.

#### **DOREEN LAWRENCE:**

So you know it's, these are professional killers, you know, they know what they're doing.

#### **V/O:**

In an unusual move detectives immediately confirmed the motive for his murder was racial, and the black community mourning his death has been on a knife edge ever since. Stephen is regarded as the fourth young victim of racial murder here in the past two years.

#### **V/O:**

Nelson Mandela interrupted a brief visit to London to offer his support to the Lawrence family. Mr Mandela met the family along for twenty minutes. He told them he shared their grief and said the evil of racism was claiming innocent lives. He said the Lawrence's tragedy is our tragedy.

#### **NELSON MANDELA:**

It's a matter of great concern that there should be an insurgence of racism throughout the world, and especially in a place like Britain which, of course, we regard as I have said before, as the home of parliamentary democracy. We are very used to this type of thing where life is regarded as cheap in South Africa, but nevertheless it's the same subject of concern that it should happen in a country like Britain.

#### **V/O:**

Mr and Mrs Lawrence were clearly moved by the meeting with the ANC President but they're critical of the police investigation into their son's murder. They say they've passed on names and addresses to the police, yet they haven't acted.

**DOREEN LAWRENCE:**

It's two weeks since Stephen's death and there's not even one, and as I keep saying if that had been the other way round, they would have had a black person. If a black person had committed a murder, they would have arrested him by now. But because it's a black, and he's white, it's as if they're condoning what these people are doing, because they're not showing to us that they're out there doing their job and arresting people. What's the point in me giving them the information if they're not going to act on it?

**V/O:**

The Stephen Lawrence murder inquiry is about more than finding his killers. The handling of the investigation could have significant political implications too. As a result senior officers from the Commissioner down are taking a keen interest.

Successfully handled, the case would boost the confidence black people had in the police, poorly judged, but can seriously damage an already fragile relationship.

Failures of the police investigation

**MICHAEL MANSFIELD Q.C.:**

I think there's been a slow recognition by the authorities, particularly investigating authorities, the police, slow recognition that there is such a thing as racial harassment, racist attacks, and for a very long time I think they not only were slow but reluctant to recognise the nature of the thing they were dealing with, so there were no monitoring units, there was no specific squad set up, and attacks that plainly were racist were either dismissed or were just treated as ordinary assaults, and there was no extra funding and no extra resources put into it. The repercussion of that has been until fairly recently that in order to achieve evidence which might lead to a conviction, they've left it too late, in other words by the time they've taken it seriously, the offenders have disappeared.

**V/O:**

Eight months after Stephen Lawrence was killed there had been no prosecution. Two white youths had been arrested and the police passed the case to the Crown Prosecution Service. But the CPS dropped it on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The Lawrence family expressed frustration at the lack of results and scepticism of the Government's commitment to fighting racial crime.

In October 1993 the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, visited the Tower Hamlets area of London after a serious attack on an Asian teenager.

**DOREEN LAWRENCE:**

I saw this video of him where he went to Tower Hamlets, or wherever it is, to visit and his idea to say everything's fine. Everything's not bloody well fine. The people are out there suffering. Listen to the people on the street. There's no point in listening to people up in Parliament and in places like that, they don't know. You listen to the people and people that these things are happening to, all he does is a smile on his face, and say that we're doing all we can, we are really committed to fight racism. This country is not committed to fight racism; they're not committed at all.

**MICHAEL HOWARD MP HOME SECRETARY:**

Well we are certainly committed to taking effective action and we are taking effective action. Now the sad facts of the case involving her son are that the Crown Prosecution Service came to the conclusion that there wasn't sufficient evidence in relation to those who had been arrested by the police to bring them before a court, to bring them to trial.

**V/O:**

The inquest into Stephen Lawrence's death was halted when the family's barrister claimed he had a witness who could identify three people at the bus stop at the time of the murder. In April 1994 the Crown Prosecution Service said that this new evidence was also insufficient to

take the case to court. By now the family were considering taking out a private prosecution against the people they believed were responsible.

At a press conference the family's solicitor expressed dissatisfaction at the way the case had been handled from the beginning. He claimed the police had failed to collect forensic evidence at the scene of the crime, that witnesses had not been contacted, there had been none of the usual publicity or reconstructions, and the reward for information was only five thousand pounds.

**SOLICITOR:**

The police were asked to put an appeal on the national media such as 'Crimewatch' to appeal for witnesses. The police were asked to effectively have a high profile re-launch. Those suggestions went ignored for months.

**NEVILLE LAWRENCE:**

They should have forensics so that when they catch these people they could back up what they're saying, and they have got no forensic, and this is one of the main problem, this is why the case has stopped, because unless somebody say to them, well, I've done it, or somebody whose one of the people who've done it, well, we done it, they're not going to be able to take these people to court.

**V/O:**

At the memorial service for Stephen Lawrence the sermon was given by the Bishop of Croydon.

**RT. REVD. DR. WILFRED WOOD BISHOP OF CROYDON:**

It is true that justice must always be tempered with mercy, and the dignity and worth of the criminal must be respected and safeguarded, even in punishment. But an ineffectual criminal justice system is the strongest ally a murderer can have. Moreover, it creates further victims as the bereaved families come to realise that they are being asked to live with their ever-present traumatising and incapacitating sense of failure to do what is right by their loved ones. So crime must not be condoned, and an important and necessary first step is that the offender must be brought to book.

**V/O:**

By August 1995 there had been no prosecution for the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

**MICHAEL MANSFIELD Q.C:**

Believe there should be State Prosecution properly resourced, independently undertaken with, that is publicly accountable on criteria that are clear, so that we all know why and how the prosecutions take place. The problem has been over the last 10-15 years is that people who should not have been prosecuted have been, and people who should be prosecuted haven't been, and the criteria that have been applied have been somewhat arbitrary, at least in appearance. Therefore one has to fall back on the right to privately prosecute, the right of the individual to sue, and increasingly over the last 10-15 years people have decided well, we will take the law into our own hands. We will prosecute where others have not, we will sue where others have not and they have achieved, these individuals and so on over the last ten years, they've achieved a great deal, certainly in damages against the police and so on. So that, but that has proved to be one way of demonstrating to the public authorities that this is what they should be doing.

The continuing quest for justice

**V/O:**

So recently there have been significant advances in the official response to the problem of racial attacks, although many of the initiatives like those you have just seen are limited in their scope. The machinery of justice too doesn't always defend the victims of violence as it should. There is so much more that still needs to be done by all the agencies concerned. The problem of racial attacks and of harassment remains a serious one, affecting thousands of people every year. In this context independent and community campaigns, such as the Justice for Stephen Lawrence Campaign, and the Newham Monitoring Project are crucially

important. When we finished making this video in September 1995 the Lawrence family had just won an important victory in their battle for justice with their private prosecution. Two men were committed for trial for the murder.