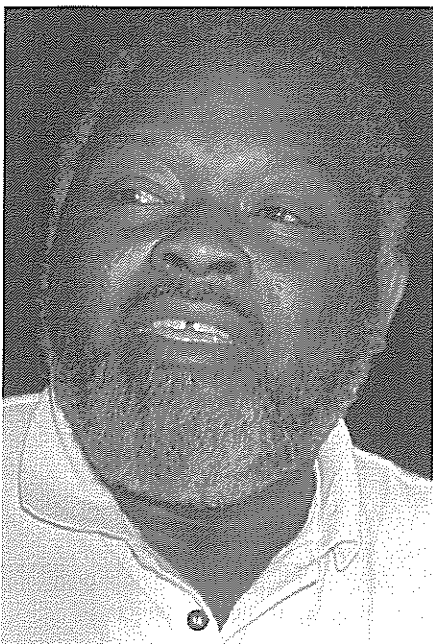


Bernie Grant and the Nation of Islam



On Monday 16 October, as Farrakhan's Million Man March was assembled in Washington, the Labour MP, Bernie Grant, spoke on a Nation of Islam (NoI) platform in London. Grant spoke as the representative of the "African Reparations Movement". Mark Osborn wrote to Grant before the meeting asking him to justify his support for the NoI meeting. Here is Grant's reply (dated 26 October)

THANK you for your letter of 3 October about my speaking at the Black Unity rally on 16 October.

You certainly seem to have very strong views about Louis Farrakhan, and these

are views which are not entirely shared by over 1 million men in the USA. I feel that you are somewhat ill-informed. There is no evidence that he was involved in the murder of Malcolm X, and my speaking at the meeting was not aimed at helping build the NoI in Britain.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together black people from all groups and religious persuasions in Britain to discuss our common problems. We have every right to meet in this way, and I deeply resent the pressure which has come from the media and elsewhere to prevent us from doing so.

I frequently attend functions and meetings where there are people with whom I have profound disagreements. In fact I go into the Commons every day and have to rub shoulders with people who are unashamedly racist and fascist. However there is seldom any comment. I find it intriguing that there is such an outcry when I attend a meeting which is made up of black people with a range of views. Perhaps it is the case that black people are seen as a threat when they meet together.

Mark Osborn replies:

1. I NOTICE you did not reply to the statement in my initial letter that Louis Farrakhan was a right-wing, anti-semitic, anti-white bigot. He is, is he not?

2. So Farrakhan had nothing to do with Malcolm X's death? Well, that is not what Malcolm X's widow, Betty Shabazz, thinks. In 1994 she was asked on WNBC-TV if she thought that Farrakhan had anything to do with her husband's murder. She replied "Of course, yes... Nobody kept it a secret. It was a badge of honor. Everybody talked about it. Yes."

In December 1964, two months before the killing of Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, writing under the name Louis X, had written: "Malcolm shall not escape... Malcolm is worthy of death."

3. Most reports suggest that there were a lot less than a million men on Farrakhan's demonstration - around 400,000. Polls indicate that only 5% attended because they agreed with the NoI's policies. Still, 5% of 400,000 is a lot of people: I'm in favour of socialists doing all they can to stop Farrakhan's influence growing further.

4. The stewards at the London meeting were NoI men. The banners were NoI banners. The meeting coincided with the NoI march in Washington and it was — explicitly — organised in solidarity with

the Million Man March.

You are helping to rally black people round the NoI in Britain. You are quoted in the Guardian as saying "Why shouldn't I speak to a meeting of black people in my own constituency? I didn't see anyone telling John Major he shouldn't share a platform with Michael Portillo who, with his own words, proved himself to be a racist and a fascist." Oh, well that's OK then: John Major can sit on a platform with a racist — and so you can too.

5. Yes, socialists should be present in parliament to take on the Tories. And I am not even saying that socialists should not debate the NoI. What I am saying that

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socialists should denounce the organisation as an utter, poisonous dead-end, and refuse to give it any type of credibility. The NoI are not an ordinary black community organisation.

6. According to the *Guardian* the loudest applause of the evening were for OJ Simpson and Winnie Mandela — a probable murderer and a murderer! Is this what we've come to?! Doesn't this sum up the character of the meeting?

7. You are a Labour MP and supposed to represent the black and white workers of Tottenham. The black workers will find no answers from "black capitalism", or Farrakhan's bigotry.

White workers will not be impressed by being denounced as "devils".

Farrakhan's ideas are an obstacle to workers' unity. We need unity, but not indiscriminating black unity — we need workers' unity in a struggle against racism and for socialism.

8. I think you have a right — in the abstract — to speak at any meeting you choose. The fact that you choose to exercise this right on the NoI's platform — on top of your discussions with Michael Howard about getting government money to help black people in Britain "return home" — also suggests that I exercise my right to say that you have joined the ranks of those who are not fit to be Labour MPs. ■