Winston Pinder

Mentor, comrade and friend

Edited and introduced by
Angela Cobbinah and David Horsley

Forward

Britain's civil rights movement that flowered in the second half of the 20th century threw up countless individuals who advanced the cause of social and racial justice without thought of personal gain or fame. One of these was Winston Pinder who had arrived in the UK from the Caribbean in the early fifties. Having already cut his political teeth in British Guiana during its radical push for independence, he immediately joined the Communist Party, using its ideology and training for the basis of what was to become his lifelong community activism, with a particular focus on youth.

As a youth worker, he was responsible for a number of initiatives aimed at challenging black youngsters' marginalised status in society and giving them a sense of self-worth. As a mark of his commitment early on, he started an informal youth club at the tiny flat in Kentish Town where he lived with his family before finding a church hall to rent, then an abandoned fire station which, as a 12 year old, the singer Eddy Grant attended. Thanks to Winston's efforts, a purpose built youth club was opened by the council in 1971, where both black and white youngsters could mix freely together, something that was thought impossible at the time. Meanwhile, the streets became his offices as he traipsed up and down to engage with young people and to help those being routinely demonised by schools and the police.

As a communist and trade unionist Winston rose high in the ranks, never faltering in his belief that another world is possible. He was involved with several influential campaign groups and worked with a long list of distinguished figures, among whom Claudia Jones would prove the most important to his political development. His own Afro Caribbean Organisation offered a platform for the wider dissemination of ideas and dialogue and helped nurture a new wave of critical thinkers. In 1985, alongside Liberation, it organised a wide-ranging anti-imperialism, peace and human rights conference at the Camden Centre attended by more than 300 delegates and featuring Tony Benn, Fenner Brockway, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Jacqui McKenzie among its panel of speakers. And personally he managed to ride the ensuing storm of Thatcherism, which sought to erode such political consciousness and unity.

The 1970s and '80s were turbulent times, which threw up both an organised fight back, which the powers that be tried to ignore, and spontaneous uprisings on the streets, which they couldn't. There was a clear disconnect between the liberal discourse on race relations and the forward march of foot soldiers like Winston, who was sacked by Camden Committee for Community Relations on the grounds of "incompatibility" but acknowledged in the same breath as a gifted youth worker. He would go on to rise to the top of the youth sector and is credited with helping to shape youth and education policy in London and inspiring the next generation of youth workers. Forceful but always seeking solidarity as the bottom line, colleagues and associates remember him as someone who gave freely of his experience and knowledge, as well as offering them something that was continually in short supply for him – time.

It is quite a life but one that has been largely undocumented. Try searching for Winston Pinder online and you will not get very far. But modest and unassuming to a fault, he would not want it any other way. However, he has definitely not been forgotten. On these pages, you will read tributes by just some of those whose lives he has touched over the years, heartfelt sentiments that also reveal the astonishing extent of his work and activism during a crucial moment in Britain's social history. These were dark days made lighter by the likes of unsung heroes like Winston.

A life of dedication

Winston Pinder was born in 1932 in Port of Spain, Trinidad, but brought up in Barbados, where his parents hailed from, the second of five children. In 1952, while working as a telecoms engineer in British Guiana, present day Guyana, he came under the influence of Cheddi Jagan, the leader of the People's Progressive Party that was mobilising for self-rule. Following his arrival in Britain in 1954, he became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and in 1955 formed part of its official welcoming party for deported US civil rights leader Claudia Jones on her arrival in London alongside Billy Strachan and Trevor Carter.

A senior engineer for the Post Office, Winston settled in the Kentish Town area of north London, where he became the victim of a racist pub stabbing and ended up losing his spleen. It was the lack of anywhere for black youngsters to congregate freely amid such tensions that led him to open a series of makeshift youth clubs before embarking on the road to becoming a formal youth worker by taking a social science degree at Ruskin College via the Post Office Workers Union.

He became a detached youth worker for Camden council's race watchdog, Camden Committee for Community Relations, a job that often put him at loggerheads with the authorities and he was sacked in 1978. But during his time with Camden he launched a number of important initiatives, including the Kentish Town Youth Club. He also independently founded the Afro Caribbean Organisation, which doubled up as a drop in centre for black youth and gathering place for political study and debate.

By the 1980s, Winston was on both the London District Committee and the Executive of the CPGB. He resisted the rise of the Eurocommunists faction in the party but was suspended from membership during the ensuing tug-of-war. His membership was later re-instated but he was barred from holding office. Nevertheless, he remained in the CPGB until it was dissolved in 1991. In the meantime, he continued to work closely with Kay Beauchamp at Liberation and with numerous other campaigning organisations like Caribbean Labour Solidarity and Camden Community Law Centre.

Winston would go on to serve as deputy senior youth worker for Islington before ending his career at Hackney, where he was the borough's principal youth officer. After retiring, he helped to run the Dutch Pot, a luncheon club for Caribbean elders in Westminster. He lives in Kenton with his wife Erma, with whom he has four children.

I first met Winston Pinder when I was putting the finishing touches to my research on the outstanding Caribbean communist, Billy Strachan. After a phone conversation we met in a pub in west London. The first thing that struck me about Winston was his quiet, modest and dignified manner.

He answered all my questions about Billy, for whom he had the highest regard, and then told me first about his life in Barbados, where he grew up, and then working in British Guiana, where he became a close friend of Cheddi Jagan, leader of the radical People's Progressive Party. When he told Cheddi of his plan to go to Britain, he was advised to contact Billy Strachan.

But once he got to London, Winston's priority was to find a job, so he did not do so straight away. However, he soon received a sharp reprimand from Billy himself for not getting in touch and what followed was a life-long friendship, with Winston telling me, "Billy was our father". His many anecdotes were invaluable in helping me complete my booklet.

The two of us met again when I was preparing to speak on the life and times of Billy at Marx Memorial Library. I asked Winston if he would sit on the platform alongside myself and Billy's son, Chris. I was overwhelmed when he agreed to speak. He began his contribution with a witty cricket analogy – he is a huge cricket fan – and went on to describe his arrival in London before giving a glowing tribute to the subject of our talk. Afterwards Winston received great applause and Rob Griffiths, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Britain, presented him with a beautiful portrait of Billy Strachan.

When I was asked by the Communist Party to write a booklet on Claudia Jones, again, I turned to Winston, who regarded her as his political mentor. In 1955, with Billy Strachan and Trevor Carter, he had been delegated by the party to meet Claudia on her arrival at Victoria Station and this led to a strong friendship that was cut short by her premature death in 1964. Again, his information helped me in writing my booklet.

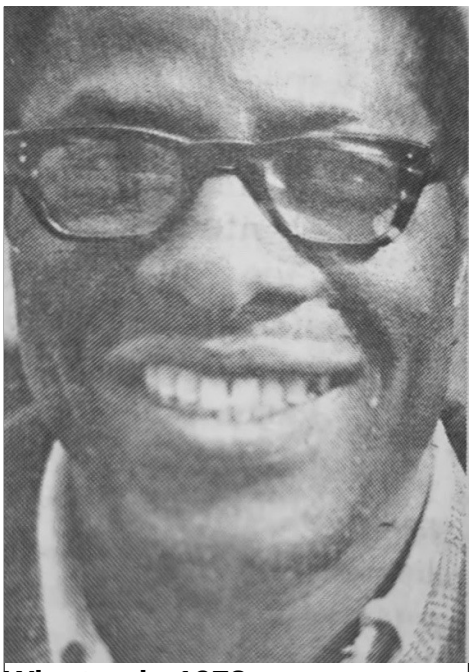
When the Communist Party held the first of its annual commemorations of Claudia Jones at her graveside in Highgate Cemetery in 2022, Winston was one of our guest speakers. Despite the awful weather, with heavy rain falling, he had travelled a long way to be there for his old comrade and he spoke with great feeling. A group of people whom many years earlier Winston had taken under his wing as a youth worker had turned up, not only for Claudia but to thank him personally for having been their mentor. It was a huge personal tribute to him and speaks volumes for his character and influence on so many young people over the years.

My favourite moment was on the occasion of the black members of the RMT inviting me to speak on the life of Claudia Jones. I needed Winston to be on the platform alongside me and two other influential black speakers to pay tribute to this remarkable woman. The four of us spoke in turn but the one who deservedly received a standing ovation was Winston Pinder.

I am so proud to call Winston a friend and I have learned so much since I first met him.

David Horsley, retired teacher and author

Winston Pinder has lived out his commitment in every sense of the word – a representative of that generation who truly believed that life must be spent every day in the pursuit of justice. For many years, he held the post of detached youth worker in the London borough of Camden where he could be found roaming the streets, many times till 11 o'clock at night.


Winston in 1978

I first met him at the Kentish Town Youth Club in Hadley St that he ran. It was a refuge for local youngsters, many of them like my brother and myself who had arrived in England from the Caribbean only a few years earlier. We'd been aged nine and 10 respectively and had come to join parents who were little more than strangers to us. I found primary school really challenging with teachers just as ready to engage in racism as pupils. Things improved at secondary school, but I still felt adrift in geography and RE lessons that only portrayed Africa and the Caribbean in derogatory terms, leaving me feeling small and embarrassed.

That's why Kentish Town Youth Club made such a difference to my life. I had somewhere to go that was about play and relaxation and being myself. I was able to get together with other adolescents who had the same experiences as me and to whom I didn't have to explain anything. My confidence and sense of worth grew in the safe and joyful environment of the youth club, which Winston and his team managed with a patience and kindness that some of us did not experience at home.

The youth club was also a haven from the streets and the police. This was during the late '70s when 'Sus' [a revived Victorian stop and search law based on being suspected of criminal behaviour] was rampant and our parents did not know if we would be back without incident once we left the house. Many young people were arrested for no reason and on one such occasion, my brother, too, was falsely accused of a petty crime and only avoided the mandatory three months' prison sentence because of Winston's skilful intervention. Winston was always there, reassuring, knowledgeable and informative. He accessed legal advice and representation, accompanied the mostly young men to various courts in north London, supported their distraught families, gave advice about college courses and jobs.

While doing his paid job, Winston went on to set up the Afro Caribbean Organisation, a voluntary organisation whose offices were situated in Gray's Inn Road, in the southern part of Camden. From there, black people were able to attend legal advice clinics put on by socially conscious firms of solicitors who gave their time freely. Young people attended all types of educational courses and workshops to support school or college work. I remember doing a youth worker course there in the late '70s. And of course there were the Friday night parties that were not only a chance to unwind but an opportunity to raise much needed funds through the sale of food and drink.

Winston is a hero in the best sense of the word, paying a personal price for putting others first.

Joy Fraser, retired teacher and novelist

Anslem ‘Sam’ Samuel and I have known Winston as a great comrade, loyal friend and political mentor for many years. He has been very significant in our lives, politically, professionally and personally.

Sam got to know him through Ruby Noblemunn, a close friend of Winston’s. Ruby invited Sam down to an organisation called the Afro Caribbean Organisation (ACO) that Winston had founded in Gray’s Inn Road, King’s Cross, around 1970. Winston was also a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which he joined soon after arriving in London.

The ACO held meetings on topics of importance to the black community as well as offering support and advice. Later, Sam and Val Jones, a political activist from Grenada, set up a study group called NIBS – National Institute for Black Studies – at their house in Crouch End. Winston immediately offered them the use of the ACO premises as well as encouragement and support.

In the 1970s, Sam was a youth worker for Islington Committee for Community Relations and Winston did the same job for the Camden equivalent. Through important links that Winston had, they organised exchange visits for young people from the two boroughs and Amsterdam, where migrants from Surinam and other former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean had settled.

Winston was more politically knowledgeable than Sam, who learnt a lot from him. Through discussions with him and Clem Derrick, who was already a member, Sam briefly joined the Communist Party. They’d be talking about anti-capitalist this and anti-imperialist that and it all made sense to him. Winston had an extraordinary ability to engage people and his influence on Sam’s political development was considerable.

I first met Winston when I was a member of the Young Communist League in Camden as a teenager in the late ‘50s, early ‘60s. I found him massively impressive as a black activist and a magnetic speaker at public meetings organised by the CP. At that time, it was very rare to see a black person operating in this way in Britain. My mother was also in the CP and Winston knew her well. Party branch meetings were held in our family home and Winston was often there.

While Winston was a youth worker in Camden he set up Camden Accord as a community organisation working with schools. I was teaching at Acland Burghley secondary school in Camden at the time and I linked up with the group, learning a lot from Winston about racism and mobilising against it. Acland Burghley became used as a base for Accord events that informally brought parents into the school, often for the first time.

Sam and I led Clapton Youth Centre in Hackney from 1979 to 1983. It was a turbulent period for young people, especially black youngsters. Sam and I announced publicly that it was to be an “anti-racist youth centre” and that members would be actively involved in running it. As a result, we would go on to link up with radical campaign groups like the Hackney Black People’s Association.

None of this found favour with the powers that be and we both faced disciplinaries and huge pressures, resulting in a massive campaign, during which Winston was one of the mainstays of our support. He gave lots of excellent advice and tactical guidance based on his wealth of experience. Winston was appointed senior youth officer in Hackney, which meant that he was our manager. Again, we found him very professional, loyal and supportive.

Winston is a truly good man who looks after people. He has a sound community orientation, especially for the betterment of the black community. For Sam, he has consistently been a good comrade, brother and mentor. We hold him in high regard and consider him a significantly important black activist and leader both nationally and internationally.

Anslem Samuel, retired youth and community worker and activist

Jean Tate, retired teacher, youth and community worker and activist

Afro Caribbean Organisation leaders Ruby Nobelmunn and WInston Pinder present a cheque for £500 to Bentley miners leader John Church in 1984 at its offices in Gray's Inn Rd, King's Cross

I will never forget the first time I met Winston Pinder. It was 1978 and I had just been taken on as a rookie reporter on the *Camden Journal*. I was on probation and my very first job was a story about a youth hostel for homeless black youth in West Hampstead.

It was with great nervousness that I knocked on the door of the imposing double-fronted house where Winston was waiting with a few of the young men and women to be interviewed. It turned out to be a great story. Winston had squatted the derelict, council-owned property with a group of young people over several weeks. They had mostly ended up on the streets after big bust-ups with their parents. Following eviction proceedings, the squatters negotiated with Camden's housing chair, a young and ambitious councillor called Ken Livingstone, to lease the house over to them for use as a hostel. The canny Livingstone agreed and a small grant was arranged for them to renovate the place, work that they carried out themselves. Now with a freshly erected sign above the door proclaiming "Paul Robeson House", it was home to 12 young people.

After our interview, Winston invited me down to the Afro Caribbean Organisation (ACO), which administered the hostel from its base in King's Cross. He ran the organisation voluntarily alongside his job as a Camden youth worker, seeing it as part of his mission to encourage youngsters to tackle social and racial injustice through "self-help", not just complaining about their plight and feeling sorry for themselves. At the time, it received no funding other than the free use of the top floor of an empty Victorian building owned by the Post Office. This left Winston at liberty to use it as a political platform, and that's how I got to meet other civil rights pioneers like Trevor Carter and Billy Strachan, who frequently came along.

I was hooked and more than happy to become part of its "drop in" activities. I soon found myself among a group of youngsters who helped organise conferences and cultural events to which the likes of MP Tony Benn, Jamaican poet Elean Thomas and Guyanese radical Andaiye were the main attractions. We threw ourselves into the campaign to raise funds to buy a headstone for Claudia Jones' unmarked grave in Highgate Cemetery. We presented a cheque for £500 to Yorkshire miners and their wives at a reception we hosted for them during the miners' strike of 1984. It was direct action at its best and deeply broadened our political understanding of the world.

Winston's commitment to helping youngsters in his midst knew no bounds and this included prostitutes from King's Cross' notorious red light district that lay just beyond the ACO offices. Incredibly, he was also involved in running the Kentish Town Youth Club, which he had campaigned for the council to set up and which proved to be a lifeline for many. Laden down with a bulging briefcase and wearing a Lenin-style cap, he would spend hours on the streets of Camden, engaging with disaffected youths and trying to rescue others from Kentish Town Police Station, which was notorious for arresting black boys for no good reason and subjecting them to all kinds of abuse in the cells. Other times, he would be in council meetings arguing the case for better youth provision and calling out discrimination wherever he saw it, only to be eventually sacked from his job for his troubles.

He would go on to be chief youth worker for Hackney council but long before this he had helped change the lives of so many young people. I still scratch my head over how he ever found the time and energy to do it all. But he did, with great dedication and without any sense of self-aggrandisement. For me, Winston is a true unsung hero.

Angela Cobbinah, journalist

I had the privilege to work alongside Winston Pinder in the Movement for Colonial Freedom, (MCF), subsequently Liberation in 1970, and in the Communist Party. Winston was an activist among black youth and after completing a social science degree at Ruskin College went to work as a youth worker for Camden Committee for Community Relations. At the same time, he was instrumental in setting up the Afro Caribbean Organisation, a militant group where his political views could be expressed and pursued.

Although Winston's work focussed on the black community, he created many projects, including youth clubs, which were multi-racial, offering safe spaces where both black and white youth could socialise. This reflected Winston's amazing ability to bring people together.

I witnessed this in my role as London Area Secretary of Liberation. Historically, the migrant communities from the Caribbean were organised according to the islands from which they originated. Confronted with racist attacks on the community as a whole and in order to build solidarity with those engaged in struggle back in the Caribbean, Cleston Taylor, Richard Hart and Lionel Jeffrey created Caribbean Labour Solidarity. Winston used his considerable talents to help keep this organisation united and focussed during the difficult period of the 1980s.

Winston worked closely with Kay Beauchamp. Kay was a veteran Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) member who had for years been involved with MCF. She had a talent of bringing forward younger comrades into the leadership of the movement, knowing when it was time to step aside and let others take the reins. She was responsible for encouraging me to replace her as London Area Secretary of MCF.

This was a period when the National Front was extremely active and Kay, working with Winston and others, succeeded in refocusing MCF in London into leading the anti-racist struggle. Kay persuaded Winston, by then employed by Camden Committee for Community Relations, to stand for the London District Committee of the CPGB. He was successful in this and played an important part in developing the party's perspectives on racism and building links with the African Caribbean communities.

At the time, the CPGB was increasingly divided between hard left 'Stalinist' forces, traditional party loyalists and the rapidly growing Eurocommunist groupings. Winston understood the importance of unity and was also a loyal, disciplined party member. There were many occasions where I experienced harsh words from him regarding my involvement with the hard left faction. However, while he never discussed it with me, I could feel Winston's pain as the Eurocommunists gained the upper hand in the party and, instead of liberalising its internal functioning, as their public platform might lead one to expect, they increasingly moved to block dissenting voices.

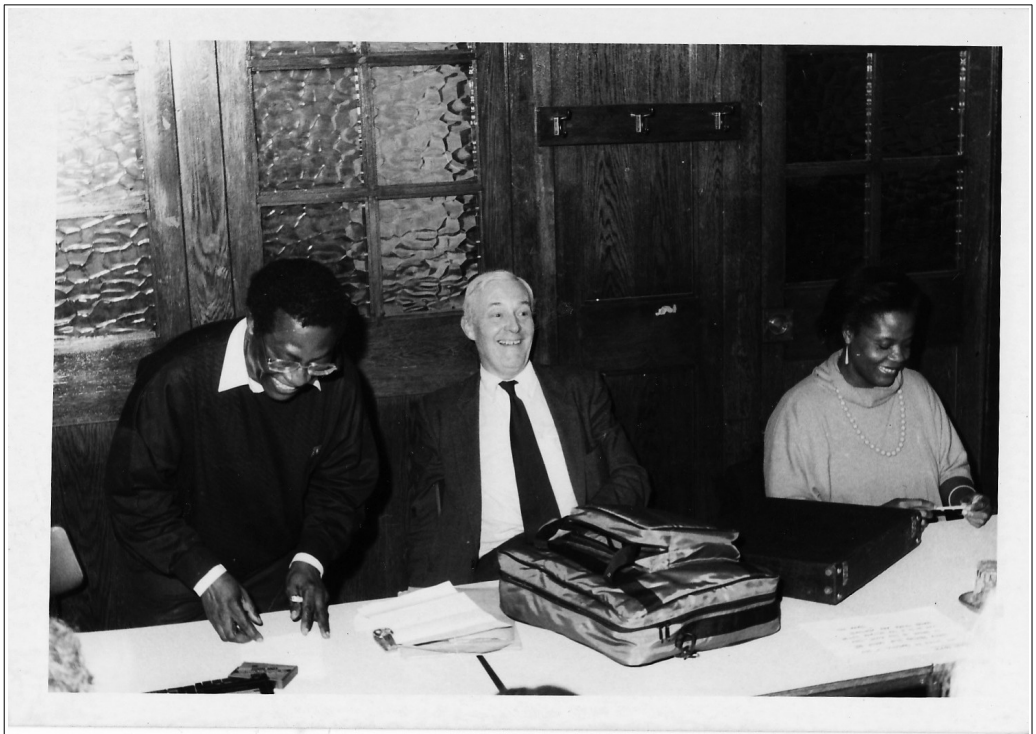
In this process they abolished many London District Advisory Committees. These included trade union and industrial advisories but along with them the groups that provided a voice for Cypriot and black members of the party. Many of them left the party as a result. I watched Winston trying to dissuade them from this course of action, but it was one of the battles he was unable to win.

At that time, I remember the support Winston provided to young black activists. Watching Winston operate was an eye opener in a movement where voices were all too often raised and frequently turned to abuse. He was always soft spoken and persuasive. He encouraged debate and argument but always opposed division. Working alongside Winston

was a joy. As a mentor he was always supportive. He encouraged debate but always sought unity in action, providing an amazing example to all those around him.

Over time our paths went in different directions, and it was many years before we met up again, in 2019. This was the occasion of a wonderful tribute to another great comrade from the Caribbean, Billy Strachan. Billy, Winston and I shared many years working together in Liberation and it was a moving experience when the meeting, organised by David Horsley, re-united us. Winston spoke of his collaboration with Billy in the warm, gentle way I remembered so well, taking me back to those exciting times when we were striving together to change the world.

Bob Newland, former member of London Recruits, a secret anti-apartheid grouping of white Britons set up by the ANC in the 1960s and sent to South Africa



Winston Pinder with Tony Benn and Jacqui McKenzie at peace and anti-racism conference, 1985

I met Winston while I was on Liberation's Central Council and I remember him being very supportive of Young World Books, the publishing project around young people's literature which Kay Beauchamp and I worked together on. He was deeply respected in Liberation because of his tireless work with young black people in the Islington area, his knowledge of the barriers which they faced, and his empathy for their youthful struggles within the school system and on the streets and estates. I remember him, too, as a campaigner who showed a powerful solidarity for Frelimo in Mozambique as well as for other African liberation movements and for those fighting the legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean. He was an exemplary figure for the youth for whom he gave so much of his time and effort.

Chris Searle, retired teacher, political activist and writer

I first met Winston in the ‘70s when I joined the white collar union, NALGO. I worked for the Greater London Council (GLC) while Winston was a youth worker for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). After a few years in the GLC housing department I moved to ILEA and joined the shops stewards committee, where Winston represented youth workers.

Winston Pinder speaking at Billy Strachan meeting, 2019 Photo by Karl Weiss

He was a great source of inspiration and, in a quiet but determined way, was extremely powerful and influential. He was supportive but also a leader. NALGO was a minority union at the GLC and attracted many of the younger staff eager to push forward overtly left policies, even if these had no chance of ever making it to the negotiating agenda with the employer.

Winston encouraged and nurtured the new and younger activists and guided us all politically without imposing his own politics. It was a process of political education which made us analyse and think through policies and positions, which strengthened our work and enabled us to recruit more members. He was poised and patient with us, taking his time, for example, over certain international questions the union was grappling with, gently guiding us towards the “correct” position, namely on Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and ANC vs Pan African Congress.

This was also a turbulent period as the Tories were mobilising to abolish the ILEA in 1980 and the campaign to stop this became a mainstream issue for all members. Winston played a key role in ensuring we worked in alliance with all those opposing the Thatcher government on this. He played a key role with other interested parties – unions, parents, community groups etc – to encourage and develop broad alliances, and this first attempt to abolish the ILEA was defeated.

Throughout this period I found Winston a great source of personal support and advice. He encouraged me and built my confidence, which was important as black women union activists were almost unheard of then, particularly in the white collar side of local government. He also became a friend. When he invited me to join the Afro Caribbean Organisation, which he had founded, I did not hesitate to do so. The meetings there were about solidarity, collective organising and political discussions. I had found my home politically.

It is a tribute to his political and personal attributes that in 1983 Winston was elected president of the GLC/ILEA Nalgo branch. I do not know where he found the time, energy and resources to take on this role as it was around the time of the fight against the abolition of the GLC and the US invasion of Grenada. When the branch set up its black members group, and when Nalgo set up its national black section, he was always there to guide and advise. Winston never forced his politics on anyone although there was no doubt that he was on the left. I cannot remember him ever talking about being a communist. However, I followed the ‘party line’ on most matters and he was not surprised when I eventually joined the Communist Party. I have said it before and it bears repeating – Winston was and remains my mentor.

Christiane Ohsan, member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Britain

Winston Pinder is a towering figure in post-war black settlement in Britain. I can think of no other person that has been so pivotal in defining the contours of the relationship between youth, race and class, in policy, in practice and in situating youth work along the spectrum of lifelong learning.

I had the privilege of meeting Winston when I was a practicing youth worker at the Metro and Cryptic One youth clubs in Notting Hill in the late 1960s. Winston's youth work practice was informed by his worker activism in the Caribbean, and his clarity about the relationship between class and race in the lives of black and white young people and their communities in London.

He was also very clear that social education and the development of political literacy in young people had to go hand in hand. As such, he, like many of us, was engaged in de-colonising curriculum and building a curriculum of youth work that related leisure and what young people did with it to the material conditions of their existence, including their access to money, to employment and to education and training. That is why, when we formed the Caribbean Education Association at the West Indian Students Centre in Earl's Court in 1968, Winston and other community activists insisted that we be more inclusive and adopt a lifelong learning approach. We debated the matter long and hard and changed the name to the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association.

Winston's collaboration with Claudia Jones was well known and it influenced to a large extent the work he did alongside Trevor Carter and Donald Hinds, both of whom worked equally closely with Claudia. So, when Trevor, Yvonne Connolly, Winston Best and others decided to form the Caribbean Teachers Association, we argued that it should be an association not only for qualified schoolteachers, but for those of us who worked with young people in school-based youth work and community settings.

Between 1987 and 1997, I had the humbling experience of being Winston's line manager, even though he remained my mentor. I joined the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) as Assistant Education Officer and head of community education in 1987, with responsibility for the Youth and Play Centre Service, among other provision, in the 12 inner London boroughs. That involved my working closely with Winston as the then Principal Youth Officer in Hackney division. Two years later, Margaret Thatcher having abolished the ILEA, I was appointed director of education and leisure services in Hackney and retained Winston as Principal Youth Officer for the borough.

Winston's contribution to the development of lifelong learning, the integration of education and leisure and to youth empowerment in Hackney was exemplary. So was his contribution over many decades to developing cadres of youth workers who had a focus on young people's education entitlement and on promoting active citizenship and the defence of young people's rights. Winston placed the latter at the centre of his praxis, not least because of the way young people, especially black males, continue to be criminalised and demonised.

I owe a huge debt to Winston for his massive contribution to my own political and professional development these last 60 years and for his lifelong contribution to youth development.

I salute you, Comrade!

Professor Gus John, academic, activist and author

I first met Winston Pinder in 1970 through a mutual friend when he worked at Camden Committee for Community Relations as a youth worker. I found him to be a friendly and pleasant softly-spoken person. I recall young people dropping in to see him at the Afro Caribbean Organisation, which he ran independently, and he would sometimes provide them with a cooked meal. It was from Winston that I first learnt of Claudia Jones, her campaigning work, her political views and activism both in the US and UK.

Juliette Burton, member of Caribbean Labour Solidarity

Winston and former youth club members at Claudia Jones' commemoration in 2022

I am grateful for this opportunity to relate Winston's influence on myself as an artist, teacher and individual.

Around 1975, I was taken along to Winston's black study group based in King's Cross by my flatmate Norma Francis, who had been a member of the British Black Panther movement. We attended once a week and I forged several contacts there, including Val ‘Owusu’ Jones who, along with Winston, always encouraged wider reading of radical material.

Karia Press publisher Buzz Johnson was also a part of the group, along with Pat Belle, who went on to work in social services before becoming an equality and diversity consultant with London School of Economics.

I was 22 and over time I went on to infuse my textile art, carnival costume ideas and teaching curriculum with themes first explored in our reading list. Winston Pinder's reading group, the meetings at the King's Cross venue and his influence have gone a long way towards moulding my perspectives as an adult black person.

Winston you have reached a grand old age and I wish you well in the years ahead.

Leslee Sharon Wills, textile artist

As young black teenagers in 1969 living in Camden Town and going to school in Tufnell Park we heard about a youth club run by a black man in Falkland Road, Kentish Town. His name was Winston Pinder. The club was a mix of white teens, mainly skinheads, who congregated at one end, and black youth, who congregated at the other. Racism was rife and the atmosphere always tense.

After a while the place was closed down and we moved into a disused fire station on Pratt Street in Camden Town, where Winston set up a club called Shock Wave. Next stop was a brand new building on Hadley Street, Kentish Town, known as the Kentish Town Youth Club. Again this was under the stewardship of Winston, who had been tirelessly lobbying Camden council to provide a place where black youths could meet freely. Activities there were geared towards promoting our personal growth and development in the community at a time when we faced discrimination on all fronts.

Many of us were being regularly arrested for 'Sus' [a revived Victorian stop and search law based on being suspected of criminal behaviour] and Winston would have to frequently visit the local police station to plead for our release. Whatever situation arose, he would always be there.

There came a time when a number of us became homeless and we squatted an empty, eight bedroom property in Woodchurch Road, West Hampstead, that was owned by the council. Winston arranged for us to meet with the chair of Camden housing, who agreed to allow us to convert the house into a hostel. It needed a lot of work to bring it up to scratch, something we all helped in doing, and the result was the Paul Robeson House.

I myself would accompany Winston to many meetings and events across London, coming into contact with black community leaders, youth and community workers and activists who shared the same vision in wanting betterment for young people. Winston was soon encouraging me to get a qualification as a youth worker, which I did.

My first job was as a student liaison worker at Kingsway Princeton College in King's Cross to help those struggling to attend classes. I moved to Leeds in 1982 and became involved in the running of a number of community centres and youth clubs. In 1992, I took charge of the city's Duke of Edinburgh Award, which was specifically aimed at inner city young people. I was very successful in getting a good number of black youngsters attaining their bronze, silver and gold awards.

l later became a member of the local Barbados Association and was invited to the National Council of Barbados Associations' AGM, where I was elected public relations officer. At the next meeting, I found myself standing in front of Winston in his capacity as National Council Advisor. It had been 40 years since we last met and, on hearing what I had been up to, he told me, "Zebe, I wouldn't have expected anything less from you." It was an unforgettable moment.

Mr Pinder, whenever those of us from back in the day meet, your name always find its way into the conversation. You are the man who strengthened us, stood by us, organised us and encouraged us to be proud of our culture. I can speak for my peers and say that, without you, most of our lives would have taken a different direction, and that's a fact.

Hey Winston, my mentor in chief and standard bearer, we from your class of '69, honour, respect, laud and treasure you. Most of all we love you. Thank you for being there as a true community leader.

Zebe Principal, retired youth worker and community activist

I should very much like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Winston as an outstanding comrade and friend.

I have had the privilege of knowing Winston and appreciating his outstanding contributions since the 1970s. At that time, he was involved in community politics and this included his involvement in Camden Community Law Centre as an active and very valuable member of the management committee.

Winston was also an active communist from whom I learned so much. He was an extremely thoughtful, highly principled comrade, providing leadership during some profoundly challenging times.

In the meantime, he continued to provide leadership in the community. I remember being so impressed by his encouragement of young people via the Afro Caribbean Organisation, which he had founded, and his enthusiasm for learning and critical reflection through his organisation of workshops at Ruskin College, for example. He was also an extremely empathetic supporter of older people's self-organisation and mutual support (as at Dutch Pot luncheon club, for instance, which he helped to run after he retired).

Winston has always been strongly committed to international solidarity and is a man of consistent principles. Above all, he has always been a warm-hearted human being. I have valued his example and his friendship over so many years and offer him my warmest thanks and appreciations.

Marjorie Mayo, Emeritus Professor of Community Development at Goldsmiths, University of London

Winston Pinder, speaking at Claudia Jones' graveside, 2022

Winston Pinder with Corinne Skinner-Carter at the installation of English Heritage plaque to Claudia Jones, 2023

Afterword

Earlier this year [1985], the Afro Caribbean Organisation invited Liberation, Caribbean Labour Solidarity and the People's Progressive Party of Guyana to join with us in organising a conference examining the theme that racism is as much of a threat to world peace as the nuclear arms race.

Racism as a political weapon is not new. The despotic rulers of Tsarist Russia used it. The Nazi use of anti-Semitism was not an overnight dream of Hitler. Today in South Africa, aside from some brave opponents, we witness white people, from workers to intellectuals, uphold the twisted laws of apartheid.

Therefore, it is our bounded duty to prove again and again that those who use racism as a political and ideological weapon not only harm those who it is directed against, but also confuse, corrupt and divide those who accept it.

Racism is also used for economic benefits. The building and maintaining of the British Empire, where the majority of the population were people of colour, was impossible without the use of racism. It instilled in the minds of the British that white people had a God-given right to rule wherever they set foot. Little wonder why the country's early industrialists talked of "black gold", which was the term given to the huge profits derived from the slave trade.

As if this were not enough, the British described those they oppressed as "savages", without a history, culture or civilisation before the intervention of the white man. In Britain, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists and the League of Empire Loyalists spread such poisonous beliefs, and their successors are out on the streets now in the form of the National Front.

Racism is not only a social ill, it is a constant menace to world peace. The recent US invasion of Grenada has shown that the issue of peace is not confined to Europe or to nuclear weapons. Every major conflict in the last 40 years has been directed against the people of developing countries, just as they are emerging from generations of colonial exploitation. In the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, the whole population has been expelled by the British to accommodate US nuclear bases.

But if war is frightening, the sight of white people invading black people's countries polarises the relations between black and white people here in the UK and elsewhere. Racist division between workers hide their common interests and help to keep right wing governments in power. Resolutely opposing racism can create the unity necessary to defeat Thatcher, Reagan and other oppressive regimes and lead to lasting peace.

Racism in our society does not just consist of ideas floating in the air but is part of the structure of this society and is sustained by relations based on domination and subjection. It is this that we must unite to eradicate.'

This is an edited version of Winston Pinder's opening remarks as general secretary of the Afro Caribbean Organisation at the Racism – Threat to World Peace conference held at the Camden Centre, London, February 15, 1985

Winston Pinder

Mentor, comrade and friend

This collection of personal tributes to political activist and youth worker Winston Pinder will not only provide an insight into the lifetime work of a dedicated individual but remind us of the little documented story of Britain's civil rights movement that he played a leading role in. Now in his nineties, Winston is part of a rich history of political mobilisation and community activism based around youth empowerment that relied on solid grassroots organisation and disciplined thinking. It is a reminder of what was fought for and what has been lost in our youth and education services over the last 40 years and its consequent effects on social wellbeing. It is also a glimpse into the possibilities that lie ahead in the inevitable forward march of history.

Photo by Angela Cobbinah