

Emancipation Day Rally Report

As the first signs of dawn flickered on the morning of Saturday August 1st RMUK members were already on point in Kennington Park. Officials of Lambeth Council had handed over the keys to the Park the previous day, so preparations for the event had been set up the night before. With two overnight guards in place, chairs, tables and other materials had been stacked under a small gazebo. Caterers *CUMMIN UP* also packed their stuff around the base of a huge tree close to the Park's cafe. The portable toilets and urinals were unloaded on arrival. So, too, the sound system. A few hard-core members didn't leave the Park till 2am on Saturday morning. The rest of the devotees returned four hours later.

Then it was last-minute.com frenzy, with traders arriving at the park to set up their stalls and goods, while the RMUK team in hi-viz jackets mounted the marquees for Reception, Office, Catering and First Aid in key areas around the Park. Volunteers shredded the green, gold and red cloths that circled the enclosure in 3-tiered bands around the massive tree trunks. This innovative décor helped to minimize expenses and added a touch of Rastafari chic to the occasion. Soon the stage arrived and was set up next to the sound and PA systems. By 12 noon the infrastructure was in place. The slow drift of attendees began to filter in from Windrush Square, London, Birmingham and other parts of the country.

The official opening of the Rally was staggered till 2pm for maximum effect and to sort out technical problems with the PA system. Meantime King Original Sound entertained the incoming crowds with memorable cuts from the Rastafari archives. Soon the customary prayers and Psalms signaled the start of a dynamic program. Yoruba priestess Sister Erelu gave a brief traditional libation. Chairperson Ras Gabre Wolde set the tone for the day with an impassioned address on Reparation, outlining the aims and objectives of the day's event as an awakening cry for the slumbering Black community.

A succession of inspiring speeches followed from a wide range of speakers. These included Bishop Joe Aldred, ecumenical activist and broadcaster, who had travelled from Birmingham to be present at the event. He was followed by eminent elder Dr Elaine Arnold, a psychiatric social worker whose focus in uniting those damaged by separation, had borne positive fruit. Dr Robbie Shilliam, reader in International Relations at Queen Mary University came next. A major organizer of the acclaimed *Majesty and the Movement Exhibition* in Ethiopia and the UK, Dr Shilliam spoke of the time '[When Britain loved His Majesty](#)', the Prince of Peace and Conqueror of Fascism, who had warned Europe of the coming World War II. Haitian-born Mario Gousse spoke of the need to get youths involved in the Reparation movement. Khareem Jamal addressed the post-slavery traumas that still lingered in the Black psyche. Minister Hilary of the Nation of Islam claimed Rastafari status and gave a hard-hitting oration on the dangers of divisive action. Lambeth mayor the Hon. Donatus Anyanwu, a long-term activist in the Borough, spoke of the need for unity. He praised Minister Hilary's address and shared his pleasure at being invited to this important event. Ras Moqapi Selassie interacted with a lively audience in his poem 'Confidence'. The closing piece was rendered by the charming young activist, Afryea Adofo, who urged the community towards self-empowerment through education as the way forward.

Sis Itricia introduced and participated in a demonstration of Tai Chi, followed by an endearing ensemble of tiny-tots with a dramatized portrayal of "I'm Black and I'm Proud".

A succession of local reggae artists came next. Among them the rising star Italo Scorcha, Vincent Nap, Lady Kanga and Vivian Jones. The last set was left to legendary Rastafari performer Joy Mack, who thrilled the audience with a medley of Rastafari chants, while latecomers from [the march](#) straggled into Kennington Park to full-take in the latter parts of the program. The sweet sound of Rastafari drummers and chanters wafted across the early evening breeze as the closing act of a memorable day left departing attendees wanting more...

The presence of the Rastafari massive and the Black community, the colourful stalls and marquees, the speakers and artistes, the sound system and Caribbean catering - all came together in a sumptuous feast of activity that transformed Kennington Park into an African village on Emancipation Day. Certainly the attendance could have been greater, but quality is not always measured by numbers.

The RMUK festival provided a day with a difference, one where the Black community found time to reflect, to be uplifted, to share experiences and 'ground' with each other in a setting that encouraged the love and unity so often missing from our everyday exchanges. The day set a benchmark for future events of this type, exemplifying what can be done by a few committed ones with a vision for liberating African descendants from the shackles of oppressive history.

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