

IMMIGRATION AND CRIME

Statistics indicating a higher incidence of crime among immigrant groups are greatly suspect. A great many hidden factors tend to bias the figures against the immigrant, and crime very often is found to be the result of discrimination

by DERRICK SINGTON

WHEN THE Immigration Bill was debated last year in Parliament some of its supporters showed that they believed that immigrants were adding disproportionately to crime. In May this year Norman Pannell, MP, suggested that Commonwealth citizens (meaning immigrants) were "particularly prone" to commit the offences of possessing dangerous drugs and living on immoral earnings, and he cited figures to support his case. The deportation provisions in the 1962 Immigrant Act itself symphonize a malaise of Britishers about newcomers in their midst. Why, otherwise, should immigrants be subjected to the special extra penalty, under the law, of being sent out of the country? It is apparent that, as a body, immigrants are admitted to Britain because their labour is needed. Without them Britain's industries and social services—notably transport, building and catering—would be severely handicapped. Why then, do we treat delinquent elements among them differently, and more severely than similar elements in other needed groups in the community, say Somersetshire farmers? It certainly reflects an elemental misgiving about the "outsider", just as does a newspaper editor who gives special publicity to the fact that a convicted person was "a coloured man" or an Irishman—though it would not occur to him to publicize the Yorkshire or Sussex origins of another offender.

Seventy years ago there was similar preoccupation in Britain with delinquency among the Jewish immigrants who fled here from pogroms in Russia. An 1894 Government Committee found, then, that the amount of crime in London traceable to Russian and Polish immigrants was "smaller than the normal proportion among the whole population". Twenty one such immigrants were in prison—one in 1,081 of their *total* number. This compared favourably with one in 993 of the indigenous London population serving prison sentences. "Foreign Jews are on the whole a peaceful and law-abiding community", concluded the report.

Sensibly, however, the 1894 report remarked that "one should not lay too much stress on the actual figures in dealing with so small a number". This last caveat applies with equal force, though in another sense, to two recent reports by the Cambridge Institute of Criminology which suggest that the delinquency rate among certain immigrant groups in London is higher than normal in respect of some crimes. In 1961 a Study by the Cambridge Institute showed that 28 per cent of persons convicted, in 1957, for robbery in London had been born overseas. Last year a preview of another Cambridge Institute Study showed that of persons convicted, in 1960, for crimes of violence in London 28 per cent were likewise foreign born. The percentage is two or three times the proportion of foreign-born immigrants in the London population. But the caveat to note, the smallness of the total number involved is important. Firstly, about 75 per cent of the crimes of violence in Britain are committed outside London and big

towns—largely by indigenous people (there are few immigrants in country and small town areas). It is therefore important not to draw false conclusions, from a survey confined to London, about the proportionate immigrant contribution to crime in Britain as a whole. It is equally necessary not to take entirely at their face value figures of convictions for being in possession of dangerous drugs given by the Home Secretary to Mr. Pannell last May: a total of 522, during eleven months, of which 62 per cent were of Commonwealth immigrants. The same applies to the statistics given of convictions for living on immoral earnings: 154 in London, of which 56 per cent concerned Commonwealth or Irish immigrants. The disproportionately high immigrant contribution could be accounted for in these instances (and in the case of the Cambridge Surveys) by discrimination in law-enforcement either deliberate, fortuitous or, as it were, built into the situation. Here are some of the things about which we know practically nothing and which crucially affect the proportion of convictions of foreign born persons:

► **Police prejudice.** This undeniably exists, especially against coloured immigrants. Members of one police force recently said there would be mass resignations if a coloured policeman were appointed and that, "in any case, he would not last long. The teddy-boys would carve him up". This kind of attitude may not necessarily be reflected in action to the discrimination of coloured immigrants. On the other hand it may be. A large proportion of appeals to the National Council for Civil Liberties are from coloured complainants against the police. Quite a number have proved justified. Offences such as "possessing drugs" lend themselves to "planting". Whether or not immigrants tend to be "picked on" by the police there would seem to be a case for more serious investigation of the question than the Willink Commission gave it. The police were allowed to tell the Commission that coloured people are more resentful against them than are other sections of the public; but coloured people's organizations were not asked to testify whether the converse holds good.

► **Ignorance.** It is often difficult to get advice or legal aid. This may apply particularly to the most recent immigrants, who have had little time to get to "know the ropes", or to immigrants with scanty knowledge of the English language. Statistics of the number and origin of persons acquitted might throw light on this. If these were disproportionately non-immigrant that might indicate that immigrants are more likely to plead "guilty" than indigenous people who "know the form".

► **Police policy.** The statistics of convictions for immoral earnings depend greatly on police policy. Each case involves long probing and investigation. If the police in an area that contains many immigrants decide on a special drive against pouncing, while other police forces remain less active about it, the statistics may falsely show that immigrants contribute disproportionately to the crime of living on immoral earnings.

Such figures as those given in the Cambridge surveys and cited by Mr. Pannell, are then, despite appearances, by no means conclusive proof that immigrants contribute disproportionately to robbery, crimes of violence, pouncing and possession of dangerous drugs, even though the conviction figures seem to indicate that they do.

But even if foreign born immigrants were proved conclusively to provide proportionately more delinquents than longer settled communities one could hardly be surprised. Human beings entering an entirely new environment are subjected to manifold special strains: A London doctor with many West Indian patients noted recently "the high rate of hysteria among the women" and of "gastric illness among the men", due, he believed, to the stresses of a new, depressing climate and to overcrowded living conditions. There are adverse factors for child upbringing in many immigrant families.



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West Indians in Kensington

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Justice. This undeniably exists, especially for coloured immigrants. Members of one of the police forces would be mass resignations, or to immigrants with scanty knowledge of the language. Statistics of the number of persons acquitted might throw light on the disproportionate non-immigrant rate that immigrants are more likely to be than indigenous people who "know the law". It is often difficult to get advice or may apply particularly to the most common, who have had little time to get to know the law, or to immigrants with scanty knowledge of the language. Statistics of the number of persons acquitted might throw light on the disproportionate non-immigrant rate that immigrants are more likely to be than indigenous people who "know the law".

The statistics of convictions for crime depend greatly on police policy, on the length of probation and investigation, on the area that contains many immigrants, on a special drive against poaching, on the forces remain less active about it, on the way falsely show that immigrants contribute disproportionately to the crime of living on those given in the Cambridge survey by Mr. Pannell, are then, despite no means conclusive proof that immigrants contribute disproportionately to robbery, on the possession and possession of dangerous weapons, though the conviction figures seem to do.

Foreign born immigrants were proved to provide proportionately more delinquency than settled communities one could expect. Human beings entering an environment are subjected to manifold stresses. A London doctor with many West Indian patients noted recently "the high rate of the women" and of "gastric illness due, he believed, to the stresses of the climate and to overcrowded living conditions". Adverse factors for child up-bringing are immigrant families.



Roger Mayne

... THE hostility of the indigenous population... West Indians in Kensington

One schoolteacher reports remarkable evidence of inferiority feeling among coloured immigrants. A Negro child, noting that the pencil given to him was shorter than his neighbour's, said: "That's because I'm not white!" A Negro mother said the same because her small girl had to conform to a school regulation which was inconvenient to the parent. Racism breeds paranoia. Paranoia is associated with delinquency.

The United States has been the laboratory of investigation into this, as into other, minority questions. Research on the subject was touched off in America by just the emotions and reactions that are now evident in Britain. In the words of one American sociologist: "The notion that immigrants must have a high crime rate, still held by the average American, is based on the idea that settlers from abroad are racially inferior, that they come from countries with social and political systems which are below those in the US and, hence, find it difficult to adjust properly to life here; that they refuse to assimilate; and that their poverty makes them especially prone to commit crimes."

Ironically enough, researches in the United States have often indicated just the opposite—that the oldest established communities contribute probably more to crime than many of the newer groups. Those first immigrants into North America, the "men of the wild frontier" set a pace of lawlessness which has never been decisively reduced. Dr. Mabel Elliott in *Crime in Modern Society* (1952) wrote: "We sometimes forget... that anti-social conduct is as much rooted in the past as it is a function of the present... the frontier culture constituted an important part of our social heritage and explains much of the American's rejection of, and disrespect for, formal legislative controls." And Samuel König, in a later work, says: "Ours is a criminogenic society: crime of all kinds is widespread in America, and among its perpetrators are primarily the native-born and frequently 'Old Americans' (i.e. of long established families)." This is borne out by figures quoted in Donald Taft's "Nationality and Crime" in which he compares the 1930 crime rate for all male whites over 15 in the U.S.—117 per 100,000 inhabitants—with that of some immigrant groups. For foreign born Hungarians it was 59, for foreign born Yugoslavs 54, for foreign born Czechoslovaks 23, and for foreign born Welsh only 17.

Only in the case of the American Negro does the recorded crime rate of a racial minority appear to be greatly higher—two or three times—than that of any other groups, either native born or foreign born in the US. And it is from this that one of the prime lessons of the American experience can be learnt. The American Negroes are not now immigrants in the sense of being foreign born. Yet, as a minority which has been fundamentally rejected by the

majority they are in an "immigrant situation"—the fact that a well known white gang there beats up individual coloured people, three of whom have been hospitalized within a few months. In August 1962 a five year old coloured girl was partially blinded, in grandparent's have been left behind in Jamaica or Kilkeny. The West Indian child, whose parents are at work when he returns from school often finds the white neighbours unfriendly, unlike the ready contacts in his native Trinidad townlet. Racism can administer direct shocks to coloured adolescents. The only coloured child at a certain school was happy until, at 15, she suddenly found that, in contrast to her white schoolmates, it was impossible for her to "date" a boyfriend.

How far does the hostility of the indigenous population contribute to crimes of violence by coloured persons? Taking a few 1962 press reports at random one reads of the conditional discharge of four white teenagers who had wounded a coloured youth after roaming the streets armed with hammers and metal levers, and shouting "England for the whites!" A clergyman social worker in North Kensington reports worst possible one. But, in the case of the American Negro, the caveat that the crime figures may mislead because of discrimination in law enforcement applies, and with much greater force than in the case of the coloured immigrant in Britain. "In the American south inequality of justice seems to be the most important factor in making the statistics on Negro and white crime not comparable", wrote Gunnar Myrdal in *The American Dilemma* 15 years ago, and it is still true today. "Negroes are more likely to be indicted after arrest, more likely to be convicted in court and punished heavily. A Negro, in the southern US because of his poverty generally cannot bribe the policeman to let him off for a petty offence, or have a competent lawyer to defend him. His ignorance often prevents him from knowing his legal rights or how to present his case. He lacks influential connections."

Even if one accepts that in the US the Negro crime rate really is higher than the white one (many people believe that "over prosecution" of Negroes is counterbalanced by under prosecution of them for crimes against other Negroes) this should hardly surprise. And it would not mean that the Negro is biologically crime prone, that there is delinquency in his blood. That idea is in contradiction of comparative evidence. For within cohesive tribal societies in Africa Negroes are exceptionally law-abiding. The conclusion is that environment is the causal factor and that the high Negro crime rate in the US is brought about by the pressure of racial antagonisms, that it is a form of what American sociologists call "the culture conflict". The pressures are familiar ones: exploitation by payment of low wages; discrimination in administering justice; contemptuous and provocative behaviour; systematic denial of housing facilities,

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limitation of access to public amenities such as parks, hotels and restaurants. It is fairly obvious that, from the psychological standpoint alone, such attitudes of a majority community must stimulate the paranoid tendencies that are associated with delinquency, and people treated as inferior come to feel inferior, and develop aggressiveness as a compensation for feelings of inferiority. The similar situation of Puerto Ricans in the US, especially New York, was commented on as follows by an American sociologist: "Their high crime rate, as in the case of American Negroes is explainable in terms of culture-conflict, discrimination and low economic status." And Dr. Frederic Wertham, the psychiatrist, in his *The Circle of Guilt*—a detailed investigation of the case of a Puerto Rican youth who had committed homicide in New York—revealed a picture of hatred, exploitation and segregation, of Puerto Ricans, and showed, in Wertham's view, that the youth's crime had been a morbid defensive reaction to threats by terrorist juvenile white gangs.

There are many differences between the situation of minority groups, whether recent immigrants or not, in the US and in Britain. But there are also some uncomfortable similarities. There are in Britain housing difficulties due to colour prejudice and exploitation of shortages; there are apartheid attitudes; there is discrimination against immigrant labour induced by trade union pressure. A rational deduction seems to be that the way to combat crime among immigrants is to remove these special social factors which tend to enhance delinquency among them. Some of the factors can be tackled by public policies; others involve individual behaviour within the majority community. Here are a few suggestions:

► Reduce the possibility of discrimination and unfairness in law enforcement by systematically training the police to face constructively the problems of dealing with newcomers of different origins and culture, who inevitably experience difficulties in achieving social integration. Some initiatives in the US can teach us lessons in this field—for example the manual *Race Tensions and The Police* issued recently for the instruction of the police force in Dallas, Texas.

► Diminish suspicion of, and antagonism towards, the police on the part of the coloured immigrant by recruiting some coloured policemen. With Negroes and Indians constituting about one per cent of the total British population—up to 20 or 30 per cent in some urban districts—we still have no single police officer with a coloured skin. The ground often given that no qualified Negroes ever volunteer is implausible. By 1948 there were 230 coloured policemen in the southern states of the US. (Significantly one Negro is employed as a prison officer in Britain, and is proving a considerable asset in that capacity). For similar reasons more members of immigrant communities should be appointed to the Bench. The

number of Negroes or Indians in Britain who have so far become magistrates can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

► Severe strains on immigrant communities, as well as clashes between them and the settled majority, arise over basic amenities and necessities which are in short supply. Housing and jobs are the two principal examples. An end to the housing shortage might do as much as any other single change to reduce the crime rate not only among immigrants but among the indigenous population as well. Full employment has the same effect of decreasing inter-communal tensions and social strain.

► While the stresses caused by these shortages persist, steps can nevertheless be taken to mitigate them. Advice and information on housing problems; warnings against rackets; elucidations of the law—all these aids have been forthcoming from certain Citizens' Advice Bureaux and similar bodies. In Willesden an International Friendship Council, grant aided by the Borough Council, does actual conciliation work in disputes involving immigrants. Forty-five towns in Britain make some provision for advice and welfare in the field of race relations. In 18 there are co-ordinating committees representing both official and private voluntary organizations.

► Certain trade unions could be more accommodating in their attitude to immigrant workers possessing qualifications acquired overseas.

► There is a great deal of long term work to be done in superseding literature and education which convey race prejudice. It may savour of *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* to suggest that much of G. A. Henty and a great deal of child fiction needs to be consigned to oblivion in the interests of inter-racial harmony. But it probably is so. A recent American nursery rhyme book has replaced "Catch a Nigger by His Toe" with "Catch a Tiger by His Toe". Why not?

Significantly, in the US, research studies into "the problem of the immigrant and crime" practically ceased in the 1940s. The main reason is evidently that immigration into America has dwindled and that most of the one time immigrant groups have become accepted and assimilated. Perhaps it would be a sign of British good sense if there were, even now, less preoccupation with the question of whether or not some exceedingly marginal statistics, which in any case are liable to deceive, do or do not prove something to the detriment of this or that group in our society. We are getting very tangible advantages out of hundreds of thousands of new arrivals in Britain. A mark of maturity might be to devote still more energy to diminishing the many stresses which face them in this country and which can obviously be a cause of anti-social conduct as of other ills. Britishers, too, are not invulnerable to the stresses of strange surroundings as last year's troubles in the British Army of the Rhine clearly showed.

THE PARTY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*Different local political
their policies hamper
council members of the
highly organized
evolve*

by H. V. WISEMAN
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University of Exeter

EMOTIVE government is not a new phenomenon. It exists and operates, but in a different way from the council in the past. It is a council in the past, but it is a council in the present. It is a council in the past, but it is a council in the present. It is a council in the past, but it is a council in the present.

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references:

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Colin Jones for The Observer

"People treated as inferior come to feel inferior . . . Children in Birmingham, Alabama