



Findings
Racism and youth
 Stan Taylor

In April, NEW SOCIETY printed the results of its special survey on the incidence of hostility to coloured people and support for the National Front among young whites living in the Hackney South and Shoreditch constituency of inner London (Stuart Weir, "Youngsters in the Front line," 27 April). The data revealed a disturbingly high level of racist feeling among the young. This feeling had not been translated into hard support for the NF to a very significant extent, but there appeared to be considerable potential for future growth. Sympathy for the NF was found to be greatest among male unskilled workers who had left school at 16 without qualifications. There was also a slight tendency for youngsters who came from families where the father voted Labour or was employed in a manual occupation to be more pro-NF than others.

The question naturally arises: how far do these findings reflect the attitudes of young whites in a particular social milieu—an inner city deprived area, with a relatively large coloured population—or are they typical of all British youth? The analysis of some data on attitudes towards local problems suggested that, by and large, it was not those youngsters most concerned about the area who were necessarily racist or supported the NF: in fact, they were least likely to approve of the party. On this basis it was tentatively suggested that racism and NF support among the young in Hackney might be symptomatic of a more general trend among youth, especially the appeal of the NF to the kind of social strata who generally support Labour.

The implication of this is that racism and support for the NF among the young cannot be countered only by measures designed to improve the quality of life or of the environment in the inner city, but that wider political initiatives are needed.

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It is possible to analyse this question a little further with the aid of some data I collected on racism and NF support among the young living in the Woodford and Wanstead constituency of outer London. Woodford and Wanstead is a predominantly middle class, affluent, suburban area, with a relatively small coloured population. The milieu is quite different from that of Hackney, as the comparison of census data for a number of social characteristics in table 1 shows. If youngsters living in Woodford exhibited similar patterns of attitudes as those in Hackney this would indicate the relative independence of racialism and the inner city environment.

The data were collected by the "straw poll" method on 11 March 1978, three days before the Hackney fieldwork was done. A total of 109 respondents were interviewed by final year students. The survey method does not allow firm conclusions to be reached, of course, but the results may be regarded as indicative.

The extent to which the sample held "racist" opinions may be judged by the responses to two questions (table 2). Respondents were asked whether they thought that white people were innately superior to coloured people. Fully 14 per cent replied in the affirmative. This figure is similar to the proportion in Hackney who were recorded as "very hostile" to coloured people. A second question was asked as to whether respondents thought that Britain would be "a better place" if there were no coloured people. A rather higher proportion of respondents agreed with this—27 per cent.

Racist attitudes were not confined to those in the sample who, when asked "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal, NF or what?" replied that they thought of themselves as NF. Accepting the small number of respondents, it does appear that at least some youngsters who did not support the NF held attitudes which might make them mobilisable by the NF in the future.

Indeed, the level of NF support and the social composition of NF supporters in Woodford was, in a number of respects,

Table 1: Social characteristics of Hackney South and Woodford and Wanstead

| | Hackney South | Woodford & Wanstead |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | % | % |
| owner occupiers | 5.8 | 67.3 |
| council tenants | 56.3 | 13.5 |
| car owners | 27.2 | 62.2 |
| non-manual | 25.1 | 60.4 |
| with 'A' levels | 3.5 | 9.6 |
| New Commonwealth roofs | 10.0 | 1.9 |

source: 1971 census, parliamentary tables

Table 2: Agreement with racist statements, by party identifications of respondents

| Identification | 'whites are innately superior' | 'Britain would be a better place without coloured people' | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|--------|
| | agreeing | agreeing | sample |
| | % | % | % |
| Con | 21 | 47 | 13 |
| Lab | 15 | 23 | 12 |
| NF | 43 | 87 | 15 |
| no partisanship | 6 | 12 | 60 |

similar to that found in the inner city area, as table 3 shows. In all, 13 per cent of youngsters identified with the NF, exactly the same proportion as those in Hackney who felt closer to the NF than to any other party. The NF identifiers were drawn disproportionately from males, the very young and those whose fathers worked in a manual occupation, again as in Hackney.

There are, however, two findings which are somewhat different. NF identifiers tended to come from families where the father was recalled as a Conservative, rather than a Labour, voter. In view of the low proportion of respondents who could attribute a preference to their father in Woodford (under 75 per cent), and the probability that many of these came from working class Labour families (recall tends to be worse among working class respondents to surveys), not too much should be made of this. The other discrepancy was in the incidence of NF support among those

Table 3: Social characteristics of respondents, by party identification

| | Con No. | Lab No. | Lib No. | NF No. | other No. | none No. | % of sample |
|--|---------|---------|---------|--------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| all | 11 | 12 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 60 | 100 |
| male | 13 | 11 | 1 | 21 | 3 | 51 | 55 |
| female | 8 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 80 | 45 |
| father's vote | | | | | | | |
| Con | 19 | 2 | — | 21 | 2 | 56 | 43 |
| Lab | 4 | 33 | 4 | — | 4 | 55 | 25 |
| other/no recall | 4 | 4 | — | 17 | 4 | 71 | 32 |
| father's occupation | | | | | | | |
| non-manual | 17 | 8 | 3 | 12 | 5 | 55 | 56 |
| manual | 7 | 15 | — | 20 | — | 58 | 41 |
| unknown | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3 |
| in full-time education or working | | | | | | | |
| full-time education | 10 | 13 | 1 | 16 | 1 | 59 | 72 |
| working | 13 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 64 | 28 |
| age | | | | | | | |
| 14-15 | 10 | 13 | 2 | 15 | — | 60 | 48 |
| 16-17 | 11 | 14 | — | 11 | 4 | 60 | 26 |
| 18-19 | 14 | 7 | 3 | 10 | 7 | 59 | 26 |

still at school, compared to those who were working—the reverse of the Hackney results.

This may reflect the fact that the Woodford survey took respondents from the age of 14 upwards and thus included a number of children who were below the minimum age for leaving school. The Hackney survey took respondents over the age of 16, which meant that those still at school would in many cases have voluntarily stayed on. Assuming that there is some correspondence between staying on at school and educational ability, the Hackney school sample was probably rather more “able” than the Woodford one. There is a relationship between educational ability and tolerance in general. The relatively low levels of support among Hackney school-children may reflect this factor, rather than the experience of being at school or working. It was regrettably not possible to disaggregate the Woodford data for degree of educational attainment or for the type of job of working respondents.

The Woodford data present, overall, a set of results which are comparable to those found in the Hackney survey. It appears that, as NEW SOCIETY'S survey suggested, racism and support for the NF are not confined to deprived youth in inner city areas but have currency among the young more generally, particularly among the young working class males.

It would not be surprising if further research found that intolerance of the minorities and support for the NF among these strata was explicable in terms of the same sort of factors which have been associated with the rise of punk and the incidence of football hooliganism—protest against a society which they see as condemning them to a mundane existence with little hope of escape. Coloured people may be used as a scapegoat for these problems: the NF offers legitimisation of scapegoating as well as an opportunity to upset older generations and to participate in “exciting” activities. It is a sad comment upon society that some young people need these outlets for their feelings.

Blacks fall back

An exhaustive survey of economic indicators has shown that despite the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, “affirmative action” and other measures to fight racial discrimination, the job and income prospects of American blacks hardly changed between 1964 and 1974 (*New England Economic Review*, Jan-Feb 1978).

Even before the onset of the 1975 recession, blacks were found to be twice as likely to be jobless as whites—which is roughly the same proportion as in 1964, the year of the Civil Rights Act which inaugurated the “Great Society” of Lyndon Johnson. While the ratio of black unemployment to white among men aged over 20 dropped between 1964 and 1974 from 2.3 to 1.9, the ratio between teenagers of both sexes increased from 1.8 to 2.4. Even these figures understate the true dimensions since during the

decade there was substantial withdrawal of black male youth from the labour force.

What the study also shows, however, is that blacks with jobs did enjoy a rise in income. The median salary of black men in 1967 was 69 per cent of whites; by 1974 it was 77 per cent. In the case of women, the increase was from 80 to 94 per cent. What this seems to show is that efforts to provide equal treatment for blacks in work were more successful than the various programmes for increasing the numbers of blacks taken on. The author says that employers have been “creaming” by hiring and promoting experienced and skilled black workers while directing little effort toward increasing black employment overall.

Black family income also failed to keep pace in the 1964-74 decade for two main reasons. First, because of a sharp drop in the job prospects of black heads of families, male and female, especially after 1970—and second, because of broader changes in family structure. The proportion of black families with both husband and wife working has decreased significantly. The study says that this exerts a disproportionately large influence on the overall ratio of black to white family income because the earnings of wives are a more important source of income for black families.

Bit of the other

The cheating husband or wife is more likely to be forgiven by others if he or she claims to be in love with their partner in an affair, suggest Jack Hartnett, John Mahoney and Alice Bernstein, following a study of student attitudes in Virginia (*Perceptual and Motor Skills*, vol 45, No. 1, page 747).

Hartnett and colleagues presented students with two stories. The first group were told of a man cheating his wife, but deeply in love with the girl involved in the affair. The second story was the same, but this time it was the wife who was cheating. A control condition simply listed the personalities of the parties involved. Afterwards the subjects were asked to rate the people in the stories according to various characteristics. Both men and women students rated the person having the affair more favourably than the spouse who was being cheated on. The male in the affair was rated most favourably.

Surprised at the results, Hartnett repeated the experiment, this time portraying the extramarital affair as one based on lust rather than love. A more complex pattern of results emerged. Male students tended to rate “the other woman” in the affair with a man quite favourably. But women were likely to condemn both the man and the woman having the affair. Both male and female raters however showed most sympathy for the person, husband or wife, who was the innocent party.

The moral seems to be, according to this research, that if you fancy a bit of the other, persuade your friends that you're doing it for love.

Forty thieves

“Every shoplifter is a triumph of advertising,” runs a German saying. Sociologists deviance have added little more to our understanding of the shoplifting phenomenon because they tend to steer clear of studying it. But when, as in the hands of Erhard Blankenburg, the research incorporates a revolutionary new methodology it is especially welcome (*Law and Society Review*, vol 11, No. 1, page 109).

Blankenburg's study, conducted in Frankfurt, West Germany, begins with exploration of unreported crime. Nothing unusual here, nor in his use of self-reported data to show that shoplifting is widespread among young people, almost to the point of being “normal.” But his method of investigating acts rather than actors was somewhat startling. With the approval of senior management, and without forewarning sales staff, 40 monitored researchers went around stealing goods from supermarkets and department stores—perhaps the *ne plus ultra* in participant observation. Not a single one was caught.

Subsequent interviews with the sales personnel revealed their lack of motivation to apprehend shoplifters. Staff had other concerns: for instance, they were expected to display politeness and helpfulness at all times. Through further tests, involving deliberately blatant thefts, the researchers set out to discover the reactions of legitimate customers, whose responses were carefully monitored. The ordinary shoplifter proved even more reluctant than sales staff to take any form of action. Yet when they were questioned later as to their attitude toward shoplifting, the same shoppers were punitive in tone.

Blankenburg had originally assumed that some of his 40 thieves would be apprehended and that this would allow him to look at law enforcement procedures. Finding this, he turned to data made available by stores, police and the courts. The two year period surveyed coincided with a major shift in the declared policy of the stores. Shoplifters were to be prosecuted “without exception.” Previously reporting and sanctioning of suspects had been highly selective. But even after this switch still only 70 per cent of “detected” shoplifters were reported to the police by stores—and just 55 per cent were punished.

Discretion had apparently assumed its customary biases: foreigners and blue collar workers (though also adults opposed to youth) were disproportionately represented among those eventually punished. The crackdown also had other perhaps predictable consequences. The incidence of shoplifting reported in stores fell slightly—most likely, says Blankenburg, because employees became more unwilling than ever to take action. The press, on the other hand, on the basis of an increase in actual court cases, indulged in something of a moral panic, with screaming headlines about a dramatic “rise” in shoplifting.