

For Discussion: *How the Black community is affected by racism from the police, the justice system and the media.*

Prepared by Reverend *Francis Ackroyd*, High Cross Church, Tottenham, with Black Women for Wages for Housework and Legal Action for Women.

- ❖ Police stop and search of young people (disproportionate number of Black people, high frequency, bad police attitude).
- ❖ Stereotype of Black people as aggressive (assumption that a Black person will be aggressive - small matters end up in accusations of assault). Aggression or anger is often understandable and would be expressed by anyone – Black or white – considering the experience of saturation policing, endless stop and search and abusive behaviour by the police.
- ❖ Harassment of people, especially Black people, who defend young Black people.
- ❖ Media and police vilification of communities and individuals they wish to target (including use of photos and images).
- ❖ Criminalisation of certain communities leads to a cycle of alienation, lack of jobs, poor facilities, etc. (areas called "symbolic locations", "no-go areas", selective raids by large numbers of police).
- ❖ Poor legal representation and very rare willingness to acknowledge this and review it (Justice cases, immigration cases, etc.) Once people have been convicted because of poor legal representation, the rest of the legal establishment is unwilling to reverse decisions as it would mean public criticism of the legal profession and the criminal justice system. They don't want to break ranks.
- ❖ The racist treatment that Black people receive from an early age at the hands of the police naturally affects the way they respond to any questioning or investigation by the police. In this context, some people would be more likely to trust other Black people in the legal establishment, even when the advice they receive is not sound.
- ❖ Police guard at trials and large media presence creating an atmosphere where a fair trial becomes more difficult.
- ❖ Pressure on police for results/juries under tremendous pressure (leads to fabrication of evidence, frame-ups and miscarriages of justice).
- ❖ Police assumption that a Black person attacked or murdered might be at fault, drug-related, etc.
So victims and families are first interrogated and valuable other leads to perpetrators lost.
- ❖ White witnesses generally thought to be more credible than Black witnesses.
- ❖ Many Black people fear to give evidence because they fear being accused or interrogated themselves. This is based on actual and widespread experience, not fantasy. This is not taken into consideration, and even dismissed out of hand by the courts or any other branch of the legal establishment when assessing evidence.
- ❖ The fear of the Black community of what is perceived to happen at police stations is now very serious. Even elderly, church-going, law-abiding Black people (white people, too) often have a real fear of entering a police station to seek redress.
- ❖ This treatment by the legal establishment results in entirely biased official statistics, and these in turn justify the policies and treatment of Black people which gave rise to the figures: a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- ❖ One form racism takes in the criminal justice system is that the "respectable" lawyers have rarely witnessed, let alone experienced, treatment which is prejudiced on the basis of race and/or class and refuse to take this seriously.
- ❖ Black people who speak out against the racism they experience are told they have a chip on their shoulder.
- ❖ The families of Black people who have been falsely accused and convicted are in an even more difficult position to get justice for their loved ones from a mainly white hierarchy. Look how hard it has been in the case of Stephen Lawrence who was not the victim of a false conviction but of a murder.