

NEWHAM

MONITORING

PROJECT

Report

JANUARY 1983

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A CHALLENGING TASK

Black communities in Britain live in an hostile environment. Many of us have to put up with racial abuses and attacks on our properties and persons. Even Newham police have had to officially admit that in the short period of six months from May 1982 to November 1982, 67 racial attacks took place. Each attack affects not only the victim but also his whole circle of friends and relatives. Such attacks generate insecurity and adversely affect the confidence of the community.

For the last two and a half years Newham Monitoring Project has been trying to assess the deteriorating situation. It has achieved some modest successes. At least it succeeded in persuading the Greater London Council to spare some resources to enable us to more effectively monitor racist activities in Newham and the response of the police and local authority.

Since Unmesh started work for the project as a full-time worker, we have been increasingly in public attention. Hardly a week goes by without some reference to our work in local circles, the press, etc. Although the publicity we get is mostly negative it highlights the fact that we are working really hard to combat racism in Newham and at the very least have managed to draw attention to the increasing number of racial attacks in Newham.

Our task is five-fold:

Firstly, we have to convince the Labour and Trades Union movement and the battery of politicians about the need of isolating racists of all kinds.

Secondly, we have to make the white disadvantaged community realise that the black community shares all their sufferings and hardships and in no way is responsible for any of the ills of our society. The real culprits are those who take economic decisions in the interest of profits of a few individuals rather than for fulfilling the needs of the whole community. Unemployment, bad housing and shortages of hospital, education and social services are their creation.

Thirdly, we must tell the establishment in a voice loud and clear that the institutionalised racism encourages racist thugs to release their 'anger' on black people. Their hysteria at the number of black citizens and their relentless obsession with inhumane, racist and sexist immigration rules play directly into the hands of fascists. The new Nationality Act and the proposed changes in the immigration rules simply add on to the hostility generated by the Immigration Act of 1971.

Fourthly, the biased and racist attitudes of the police exacerbates the already tense racial situation. Until we succeed in forcing the Home Office to institute instant dismissal of officers who exhibit racist behaviour, the black community cannot put its full faith and confidence in the police to protect it from racial attacks.

Fifthly, given the lack of police response to racial attacks, the black community has no choice but to organise and defend itself. We seek to give assistance to this development.

....

I sincerely hope that with the help and good wishes of all the sections of British society we will make substantial progress in the coming weeks and months.

H.S. Dhesi
Chairperson: Newham Monitoring Project.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

1982 has marked a significant change in the Newham Monitoring Project. Our ability to employ a full-time worker, Unmesh Desai, has led to our increasing our scope and effectiveness in dealing with racism in the Borough.

As we expand our work the enormity of the problems that we are trying to tackle become even more apparent but at the same time we are attracting people who are prepared to play an active part in the Project and to take the issues out into the black community and the community in general.

As we become more effective we can also expect to draw more reaction and antagonism from those who either actively support racism or who feel that it is not an issue to be dealt with openly and directly by all anti-racists. I feel that the widespread support we have gained over the last year has enabled us to stand up to such antagonism and even gain strength through dealing with it.

I would like to make special reference to Unmesh Desai's work for the Project. Despite a serious illness his hard work, imagination and enthusiasm for the Project have been the catalyst for the great expansion of the Project's work. He has also been responsible for building our links with London-based and national organisations with similar aims to our own.

Unmesh's work for the Newham 8 Campaign has been unstinting and I know is greatly appreciated by the defendants. The importance of this campaign for the people of Newham, particularly for black youths, cannot be over-estimated and I am proud that the Project has been able to give such support.

However, despite the increasing number of people who are prepared to be active in the Project, particularly the emergency service, it has become clear that there is far too much work for one full-timer. We will therefore be applying to the GLC for funds for further workers and I hope very much that our application will be successful.

I think the Project can look forward to a year in which we will achieve even more and in which I hope we will really start to make an impact on the level of racial and police harassment in the Borough.

Carolyn Sikorski
Secretary: Newham Monitoring Project.

INTRODUCTION

Events in the last six months have more than any other factor proved why an organisation like Newham Monitoring Project is so necessary.

The period since we were granted our funding in June 1982 has been a decisive one in the history of the Project's two and a half years existence. During this period it has passed through a number of events and has been involved in a number of issues, all of which have combined to put it on a sounder footing than ever before to pursue its central task of monitoring racial attacks in Newham and the response of the police and local authority to such attacks.

This interim report covering the period since my appointment on 12.7.82 looks back at the work we have done so far, the problems we have faced and what we seek to achieve in 1983.

Before expanding on these themes I feel it essential to stress the exact nature and function of the Project. Newham Monitoring Project exists to monitor racism and racial attacks in Newham and the police and local authority response to such attacks.

As a police monitoring group we believe that the present concessions to accountability such as Liaison Committees are meaningless and a purely cosmetic exercise and thus we campaign for police accountability to you, the ratepayer of the borough. To achieve these twin aims and enable us to improve the effectiveness of our work we are also in the process of organising a 24-hour emergency service. Much more fundamental questions, in some cases demanding different organisational forms, about the state of our society and the racism so inherent in it are obviously raised. It is a partial reflection of this problem that an organisation like NMP has to exist.

CASEWORK

NMP has never seen its work as merely stacking statistics on the number of racial attacks and simply assessing what the response of the police or local authority has been. We have at all times endeavoured to help, support and guide victims of racial attacks and police harassment by making people aware of their rights, referring them to appropriate agencies and exerting pressure on such agencies to make sure that they do their job. We regard casework as important because it enables us to do our monitoring work much more effectively by building up a picture of racial attacks in Newham and what the police and local authority are doing about such attacks. Given the total non-response of the police to racial attacks and in some cases outright hostility, we believe that it also provides credibility to the Project as such victims know that they have an independent pressure group to turn to which will pick their case up and fight for their rights, using both legal and extra-legal resources. Above all to prevent us from turning into a purely 'social welfare' agency the issues raised by casework can provide us with a campaigning base, always giving us that essential outward orientation.

The Project sees campaigning work as of the utmost priority because we believe that it is only by involving people on the widest possible level and getting the victims of racial/police harassment to act for themselves that we will be successful in the long run.

Since June 1982 we have been involved in a number of group and individual cases:

Newham 8 Defence Campaign.

The Project has been actively involved in organising and mobilising support for the Newham 8 Defence Campaign activities.

The arrest of eight Asian youths aged 15-21, defending themselves and their community from racial attacks, has raised several fundamental questions about policing in Newham and the police response to racial attacks.

Racist attacks in and around Newham schools take place on a frequent basis. In the week prior to the arrests of the eight youths there were several attacks on Asian schoolchildren in and around Little Ilford School in the Manor Park area of Newham. In spite of requests made to the police little or no protection was provided and nothing done to stem the rising tide of attacks. In one incident three Asian schoolchildren, all juveniles, arrested for defending themselves in an attack in the school playground, were detained at Forest Gate Police Station for over six hours and questioned without any parents/guardians present.

The eight youths were arrested after incidents with plain clothes police officers in which it is claimed that they did not declare their identity and proceeded to attack the youths.

When the youths defended themselves uniformed police arrived on the scene and arrested the eight youths who now face charges ranging from

conspiracy to assault persons unknown to actual bodily harm and threatening behaviour.

As far as the Project is concerned, in regard to its brief of monitoring racial attacks and the police response to such attacks, a number of questions arise: why did the police fail to respond to the increasing number of racial attacks around Newham schools in spite of requests for help? Why were plain clothes police used? Official explanations that they just happened to be the first to arrive on the scene is a line which even the police themselves have hardly pushed with any vigour. How many and in what capacity are plain clothes officers used in Newham and whether their job can be done by uniformed policemen? Why has no action been taken against the perpetrators of the numerous racist attacks upon Asian school-children, one involving serious injuries? A number of incidents involving harassment of Asian youths by the police have emerged since the arrests, all of which are being followed up by the Project. Whilst trying to get the police and school authorities to treat such racial attacks in a serious manner I have also been actively involved in the campaign to defend the eight youths.

The First Avenue 11 Campaign.

The Project was actively involved in mobilising and campaigning in support of the First Avenue 11, another case which has highlighted some disconcerting police practices, police harassment of black people and especially petty harassment of Afro-Caribbean youths.

The arrests of eleven members and friends of the Ramsay family involved members of the Special Patrol Group on duty in the Newham area. Although found guilty of the charges against them, ranging from assault to violent behaviour, the Stipendiary Magistrate at West Ham Magistrates Court commented that an excessive number of policemen may have been involved in the arrests.

The Project, along with Newham Rights Centre, has given assistance to the defendants to make formal complaints about incidents involving police violence during the arrests and in previous harassment of the family. This harassment has taken a number of forms, e.g. a police helicopter swooped on two youths from First Avenue who were visiting friends in nearby Sixth Avenue. They were pursued through the streets to their home in First Avenue by the helicopter which was joined there by vans and a car full of police officers.

With the helicopter hovering at rooftop height and frightening local residents, the two youths were arrested for stealing the car in which they were driving. They were subsequently released without charge when it was pointed out to the police that the car belonged to one of the youths.

The use of police helicopters in such 'raids' is of particular concern to us. While it is hard to obtain logistical details in such cases a number of complaints have been made by local people about police helicopters in the area.

One case which merits attention is where a helicopter was used to terrorise a black family in the Stratford area of Newham. Again plain-clothes police officers were involved in the incident and a person detained overnight and released the next day without being charged. He now feels too intimidated to lodge a formal complaint about the conduct of the police in this particular incident.

The case of Luke Fordjour.

One particular case the Project has taken up is that of Mr. Luke Fordjour. Mr. Fordjour lost the sight of his left eye in a racial attack in Forest Gate in January 1982. In spite of attempts by local solicitors to arrange an identity parade none was organised until April 1982 when Mr. Fordjour positively identified his assailant.

He was lead to believe that the assailant would be prosecuted and was congratulated on his identification.

However, the police have since then refused to bring a prosecution, reasons given varying from 'lack of evidence' to 'there are several problems with the case'.

The case has thrown up several disturbing police actions with Mr. Fordjour's address being supplied to the father of one of the assailants and a total police disinterest in the case with one officer commenting 'I have better things to do than handle your case'.

The Project is at present working with Mr. Fordjour to persuade the police to prosecute the assailants. A national petition campaign is being organised to this end and we are using every possible avenue to secure justice for Mr. Fordjour.

The Project has either handled or has been involved in 32 cases (as at 25.1.83) since July 1982.

With the launch of our 24-hour emergency service we expect the number of reported cases to be greatly increased. For the moment we feel that the cases reported to us represent only a tiny proportion of cases of racial attacks and police harassment that do actually take place.

A lot of cases do not get reported either because people may not be aware of our existence or are simply too frightened to pursue the matter further, having already been subjected to a harrowing experience.

In a few cases allegations of police intimidation has prevented victims from picking the case up. Above all, a lot of cases do not get reported because people either have accepted racial harassment as part of living in this society or take harassment such as verbal abuse for granted, or lack faith in the police, the complaints system, etc. to report cases.

From the work we have done so far the main problem we have found is the lack of adequate police response to racial attacks, e.g. Mrs. G. in Canning Town, who has suffered from racial harassment for a long time now and has been able to identify her assailants has still had no response from the local police. Again there is an absolute reluctance by the police to acknowledge the racial element in a case and to prosecute attackers, e.g. in the case of Mr. F. who was subjected to racial abuse before being attacked; the police have totally refused to acknowledge any racial element whatsoever. Even in the case of Mr. M. where a prosecution was brought against the harassers the police would just not acknowledge the racial element involved although it was clear that the family was suffering from racial harassment solely due to the

colour of their skin. This police practice is extended to arresting the victims of racial attacks without any action against the culprits, e.g. Mr. J. who was arrested in East Ham for threatening behaviour after being assaulted by a gang of six white youths. He was eventually given a conditional discharge.

Although the Project has always encouraged them to do so, given the lack of response to racist attacks, victims are now reluctant to report their attacks to the police.

Petty harassment of black youths, especially Afro-Caribbean youths, is another feature of policing practice in Newham. We have defined such harassment as being constantly stopped and searched, hounding people, moving them on continually from one place to another, continually being asked to produce driving documents and so on.

In one case an Afro-Caribbean youth was detained and had his car kept in police custody for over a week without any reasonable explanation although his driving papers were in order.

The Ramsay family has particularly been the subject of such harassment.

The Project is presently involved in two cases where the victims have been charged with obstruction after being stopped and searched, subjected to petty harassment and considerably provoked. This sort of police harassment has concentrated around two youth clubs, catering for the needs of unemployed black youths.

There are several complaints pending at present (8) with some more expected once the court cases involving the prospective complainants have been concluded.

However, people are wary of complaining because they feel that 'it takes too long and is a waste of time', or have no faith in the present system whereby one policeman investigates a complaint against another.

RACISM, THE POLICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To highlight the crisis of policing in Newham, police harassment of black youths and refusal to take firm action against racial attacks the Project organised a Week of Action from Thursday, 28th October to Friday, 5th November. This, our biggest single initiative to date, passed off with remarkable success and is something in which Project members can take justifiable pride.

The striking feature of the Week of Action was perhaps the whole-hearted involvement of the victims of racial/police harassment who have approached the Project.

Local police stations were picketed and the project helped to mobilise support for the picket of West Ham Magistrates Court on November 5th called by the Newham 8 Defence Campaign. 500 local schoolchildren went on strike that day to protest against racial attacks in Newham schools. A special issue of Newham Monitor was produced and extensive publicity about the week ensured that our arguments about police accountability and harassment reached a wide audience. All the pickets were well supported, indicating an increasing concern about racial attacks in Newham and the lack of response on the part of the police.

The Week of Action also helped in developing and widening the debate about policing in Newham which has been lacking to date.

The decision of Newham Council to set up a police sub-committee is welcomed by the Project. Although we do not see the fight for police accountability as an end in itself and the solution to more fundamental problems of police racism, etc., the proposed sub-committee is a step in the right direction. The Project has always rejected liaison committees as toothless, cosmetic structures and will continue working to ensure that the new sub-committee picks up relevant questions about policing in Newham, such as racist behaviour by local policemen, and not turn into another bureaucratic structure.

Through its publicity work, invitations to speak at meetings and 'Newham Monitor' the Project has made clear what is meant by police accountability and how it differs from mere liaison. We soon hope to launch a campaign aimed at local political and community groups, voluntary organisations, youth clubs, etc., on the fight for police accountability. Through this we also hope to make people aware of their rights. It is hoped to link this with the campaign against the Police Bill presently going through Parliament which will give the police unprecedented new powers on the streets and in police stations, e.g. to stop and search you on the streets if the police think you look suspicious, i.e. on 'reasonable suspicion'. The Project can provide speakers on the Bill and the campaign for police accountability.

EDUCATION

The Project is actively engaged in anti-racist education work. A number of meetings in this respect have been organised to date and it is hoped to present our proposals with regard to anti-racist and not merely multi-cultural education to Newham Council. The Council, not untypically, has had an appalling record in this respect.

Through consultation with teachers' unions, and others active in this field it is hoped to develop this work in the coming months.

Project members are also involved in the inquiry being undertaken by Newham NUT into racial attacks in Newham schools.

EMERGENCY SERVICE

It is hoped to start a 24-hour emergency service to give help, advice and support to victims of racial attacks and police harassment. This will be the biggest ever initiative undertaken by the Project and it is hoped that this will improve the effectiveness of our monitoring work and case documentation.

A successful training school for the 30 volunteers taking part was organised on Saturday, January 15th, with speakers from CAPA and Release. A follow-up training school is to be organised in the very near future and we hope to start the service on March 1st.

WORK WITH OTHER GROUPS

Useful co-operative links exist with the Newham Rights Centre, local trade unions and Labour parties, ethnic groups and youth organisations. A few victims of racial attacks have, as a result of their experiences, started to play an active rôle in the Project.

The Project is also involved in the London Federation of Police Monitoring Groups and we attempt to liaise and work, wherever possible, with NCCL and Release. I have also been to meetings of the proposed All-London 24-hour emergency service. We also liaise with the GLC Police Committee, keeping them informed of our work and particular issues of importance through their Support Unit, evidence to meetings and inquiries and through contributing articles on policing in Newham to their bulletin 'Policing London'. The Project has also submitted evidence to the GLC Police Committee Inquiry into Racial Harassment.

We are also attempting to develop links with Social Services and the Probation Service. I gave a talk on the Project to Newham Council Social Services Managers. I have also given talks about our work to local womens groups, teachers meetings, ethnic groups and two local youth clubs. One of the youth clubs where I spoke has its members regularly harassed or subjected to racial abuse by the police and I am in the process of getting together an NMP 'Bust'card/Rights Sheet which

we hope to distribute as widely as possible.

We regard such educational work as of extreme importance, not only in terms of making people aware of their rights but also getting them to play an active role in the Project. A lot more needs to be done in this field and I intend visiting as many schools, youth clubs, tenants associations and community groups as possible.

PUBLICITY

We regard this as important because we feel that racial attacks and police harassment should not just be taken for granted but be publicised as widely as possible so as to make people aware that racism is rampant and alive in Newham.

We have had a lot of publicity in recent months, both locally and nationally. Apart from front page features in the Newham Recorder - the uncomplimentary nature only served to bring us increased support - Capital Radio and LBC 'Black Londoners' have done programmes on the Project. The New Statesman, Daily Jang, Caribbean Times and The Voice have all carried articles about our work and some of the cases we have handled. East End News has always been extremely supportive. It will be carrying a special feature on Racism in East London in its March 1983 issue to which the Project will be contributing. We also helped Channel 4 'Black on Black' in their programme about the new Police Bill. Searchlight, the anti-facist monthly magazine, has always been helpful and did a whole page interview with us in its November 1982 issue. The Runnymede Trust bulletin - certainly read by local community liaison officers! - has also reported aspects of our work. The Guardian and City Limits, however, have failed in this respect. We have also been mentioned in local Labour Party and trade union bulletins.

FUTURE PLANS

We hope to start our emergency service on 1st March 1983. The initial stages of the service will take up a lot of our time and resources as our casework will obviously grow and this will have to be borne in mind when considering our work over the next few months.

We hope to further develop our work around education and housing and hope to have our own detailed anti-racist policies in both fields.

It is hoped that our education work can expand in 1983. This is of crucial importance if the Project is to grow and increase its representation and I intend giving priority to this area.

We also hope to increase the effectiveness of individual/organisational participation in the Project by organising regular training sessions on the emergency service, police monitoring and other aspects of our work.

It is also hoped to produce Newham Monitor on a quarterly basis.

We also hope to develop a local campaign against the Police Bill and will be monitoring the working of the new police sub-committee of Newham Council.

Our main problem - albeit a familiar one - is a lack of sufficient resources to cover our expanding work. A few individuals have played a key part in getting the Project to its present stage but with the work we are currently doing we feel that a second worker would be of inestimable value to the Project.

Since casework can be extremely time-consuming a second worker would be able to develop our campaigning and educational work, liaise with other bodies and can also do some research work.

On top of all this there is of course the administrative and organisational work to be done.

It would be of particular help to me if we could also get a worker to develop our work around housing and education.

A lot of work still needs to be done and a number of problems do exist. However, I would say that the Project can look back with pride in its past work and performance and go into 1983 from a position of strength. Its ultimate success depends on your active participation.

This report will have succeeded in its objective if it has persuaded you to do so.

Unmesh Desai.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT ON 25.1.1983

INCOME

£.

G.L.C. Grant	8,296. 00
Membership fees on 25.1.83.	86. 00
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	8,382. 00

EXPENDITURE

£.

Salaries	3,367.79
Printing & Stationery	187.00
Literature & Subscriptions	3.05
Postage	96.24
Travel & subsistence	10.50
Rent, Rates & Insurance	875.00
Heating & Lighting	218.75
Advertising	120.00
Hall Hire	14.30
Miscellaneous	39.79
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	4,932.42
Cash at bank 25.1.83.	3,333.88
Petty cash in hand 25.1.83.	115.70

£8,382. 00

Note: New exchange line has been installed. Account yet to be paid.
(Approx. £100.00).