

British Muslims face increased racist attacks and state harassment

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12 August 2005

Police figures on religious “hate crimes” have revealed a sixfold increase in attacks, particularly against Muslims, since the July 7 terror bombings.

There were 269 religious hate crimes in the three weeks after July 7, compared with 40 in the same period of 2004. Most of these were verbal abuse or minor assaults, but there were also a number of mosques damaged and arson attempts. In the worst incident, an Asian man in Nottingham died last month after being found unconscious, reportedly after being racially abused by a group of youths.

The *Independent* newspaper conducted a survey of police forces across Britain and found a dramatic increase in the number of racist assaults since the July bombings. The paper reported that “as many as one in six of those abused or attacked were not Muslim but were simply of an Asian appearance.”

Far from being centred on London, such incidents have been recorded across Britain. The survey showed that forces such as West Yorkshire and West Midlands had seen significant increases in race-hate crime. Attacks in South Yorkshire, which includes Sheffield and Doncaster, leapt from 48 in the previous July to 137. Those reported by West Yorkshire Police, which covers Leeds and Bradford, leapt from 195 to 366. In the West Midlands, including Birmingham, attacks increased by 46 percent, while Merseyside, including Liverpool, saw an increase of 76 percent. Nationally, the figures rose by 24 percent, from 3,355 to 4,160.

In Scotland, the level of racist attacks rose from 359 to 438. According to the *Independent*, “The Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland said 64 could be directly linked to the London attacks ‘because of what was said or written at the time of the incident.’”

The Islamic Human Rights Commission, which

before the July 7 attack was receiving about 5 reports of racist incidents a week, said it had received 320 complaints of attacks on Muslims since the London bombings. Beena Faridi, a case worker, told the *Independent*, “It seems to be happening all over the country. There is a feeling of fear on the streets.”

Responding to the police report, Professor Zaki Badawi, head of the Muslim College in London and chairman of the Council of Mosques and Imams, wrote: “In the present tense situation, with the rise of attacks on Muslims, we advise Muslim women who fear being attacked physically or verbally to remove their hijab [headscarf] so as not to be identified by those who are hostile to Muslims.

“A woman wearing the hijab in the present circumstances could suffer aggression from irresponsible elements. Therefore, she ought not to wear it. Dress is meant to protect from harm not to invite it.”

Having whipped up the hysteria and xenophobia that has emboldened the racists, the government has offered nothing to oppose such attacks other than cynical appeals for respect and tolerance towards other cultures. But it has also banged the drum for Muslims to prove their loyalty to Britain and commitment to opposing Islamic extremists—as if the vast majority of British Muslims were not already hostile to the terrorists. The Home Office terrorism minister, Hazel Blears, suggested that there should be a discussion about the “re-branding” of ethnic minorities and that terms such as “Asian British” should be used, similar to terms such as “Irish American” in the United States.

The police tried to play down the significance of the increase. Metropolitan Police Authority Chairman Len Duvall said that although any hate crime was not to be tolerated, many incidents previously defined as race

crimes were now designated faith crimes, leading to a “large percentage increase from a very low base.”

Assistant Commissioner Tarique Ghaffur also stated that the rise was partly due to the fact that faith hate crimes were now recorded separately from other racial incidents. However the figures are reported, it can not be denied that there has been an increase in racist activity since July 7. Ghaffur revealed that in the first three days after terrorist attack, there were 68 “faith hate” crimes in London alone.

Ghaffur admitted that Muslims faced increased police harassment and were particularly frustrated by the stepping up of stop-and-search operations and the new shoot-to-kill policy, revealed following the state murder of Jean Charles de Menezes. “There is no doubt that incidents impacting on the Muslim community have increased,” he said, warning, “It can lead to these communities completely retreating and not engaging at a time when we want their engagement and support.”

The police figures were released as Blears held the first in a series of meetings with Muslim groups across the country. Prior to the meeting, Blears pledged that Muslims would not be discriminated against by police trying to prevent potential terror attacks. She claimed “counter-terrorism powers are not targeting any community in particular but are targeting terrorists.”

Blears also opposed police use of racial profiling, saying stop and searches should be based on good intelligence, not just on skin colour.

Such statements will be of little comfort to the thousands of young Asian men who are stopped and searched at Underground stations throughout the capital every day.

Blears’s attempt to reassure young Muslims was undermined within days when Ian Johnston, the chief constable of the British transport police, told the *Mail on Sunday* that his force would “not bottle out” of intelligence-led searches, which could target specific ethnic groups. He said his officers would not be searching “little old white ladies.” Instead, he said, “It is going to be disproportionate. It is going to be young men, not exclusively, but it may be disproportionate when it comes to ethnic groups.”

For their part, the Conservative opposition has used the London bombings and the Labour government’s proposed measures to deport and exclude Islamic radicals as an opportunity to push its own racist agenda.

The Tory defence spokesman, Gerald Howarth, said extremist Muslims should leave the country. “There can be no compromise with these people,” he told *The Scotsman*. “If they don’t like our way of life, there is a simple remedy—go to another country, get out.”

When he was asked, “what if those people were born in Britain?” he replied: “Tough. If you don’t give allegiance to this country, then leave.”

Tory party leader, Michael Howard, said he stood by Howarth’s comments.



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