all-party-backed Jarrow March of 1936 led by the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson did cast a spotlight on the social conditions of the long-term unemployed.

Throughout the 'thirties' a number of Public Works schemes were designed to stimulate jobs and economic development, both in the North and South Wales. Following the Jarrow crusade of 1936, a Special Areas Amendment Act was passed in 1937. This resulted in trading estates like Gateshead's Team Valley being set up, with emphasis on light industries like clothing and industrial components. These were largely ineffective to tackle the scale of the regional unemployment problem. As Tom Hazledine (4) notes in *The Northern Question*, only 4,000 people were working in the Team Valley by 1938, in contrast to the southern trading estates at Slough and Park Royal, London, which employed over 30,000.

Although unemployment came down by the end of the decade, it still stood at 1.4 million in 1939. It was the massive demands of war for people and munitions which saw the re-opening of the Tyne and Wear shipyards and engineering plants which finally helped to solve the worklessness problem both in the North and elsewhere.

References:

1. Derek Fraser (2017), *The Evolution of the Welfare State.*
2. Martin Pugh (2009), *'We Danced All Night'.*
3. John Stevenson (1990), *British Society 1914-45.*
4. Tom Hazledine (2022), *The Northern Question.*

Thinking critically about whiteness, class and education

Dan Whittall ***argues against the focus of Philip Dore's article on 'Aspirations of white working-class boys' in PSE 109.***

In their recent important book *Fractured: Race, Class, Gender and the Hatred of Identity Politics*, Alex Charnley and Michael Richmond (2022) suggest that the term 'white working class' is amongst a number that have 'operated for over 150 years as signifiers of deservingness that immiserate the working class as a whole'. The quote came to mind whilst reading Philip Dore's article 'Aspirations of white working-class boys' in *PSE* 109.

In debates and policy-making around education, the term 'white working class' has taken on particular power as part of what Diane Reay (2009: 28) has described as a 'pervasive moral panic about white working class educational underachievement'. This enactment of a moral panic around white working-class education, Reay argues, can only be understood as part of 'a policy of divide and rule that pits one educational disadvantaged group against another'. Recent years have witnessed what Sameena Choudry terms 'hysteria and moral panic', backed up by 'sensationalist headlines', that have sought to frame the interests of 'white working class boys' as being 'diametrically opposed to that of BME working class communities' (Choudry, 2018: 310-311).

Rather than expose and contest the workings of the term 'white working class' in education, Dore's article accepts it uncritically, and even cites some of the main ideological battering rams of the past few years as though they are innocent and neutral sources of evidence on the subject.

For instance, Dore begins by citing favourably from the Education Committee Report (2021). He doesn't, though, give the full title of the report in the body of his article. This title is important because it is revealing of the kind of ideological push that the report sees itself as a part of: *The Forgotten: How White Working-Class Pupils Have Been Let Down, and How to Change It* (Education Committee, 2021). The very fact that this report covers similar ground to another government report from 2014 ought to make us pause and wonder what ideological work is being done here. Nor does Dore mention that four Labour members of the Education Committee opposed the publication of *The Forgotten*, arguing that 'it was clear from the outset

that Tory members of the committee were trying to politicise the issue' (Parveen and Weale, 2021).

Dore uses statistics from the report to suggest that they demonstrate a pattern of 'white working class' under-attainment. However, this very data has already been comprehensively discredited by David Gillborn. Writing in *The Guardian* shortly after the 2021 report was published, Gillborn (2021) showed how it conflated data on Free School Meals (FSM) students with the wider term 'working class' in a manner that is entirely inaccurate. As Gillborn (2021) puts it:

> . . . working-class children are not the same as those on free school meals . . . In Britain around 60% of adults think of themselves as working class; but free school meals kids make up only around 15% of white pupils in state schools. Simply by replacing 'FSM' with 'working class', the MPs' report exaggerates the size of the issue by a factor of four. Not only that, it makes 60% of adults feel that their children are being held back unfairly.

Taking Free School Meals eligibility as a cipher for working-classness is particularly useful if your intention is to racialise the working class and identify 'whiteness' as being associated with particular disadvantage and maltreatment. Taking definitions of impoverishment other than FSM presents us with a different picture altogether. As the Runnymede Trust has noted: When observing the statistics for students who do not fall into the 'free school meals' bracket, it is black Caribbean students who fare worst. Indeed, 47% of Black children, 54% of Pakistani children and 60% of Bangladeshi children live below the poverty line in this country, compared to 23% of white children' (Treloar, 2021).

That Dore takes the highly problematic evidence of the Education Committee Report as the uncritical basis for his argument is concerning. *The Forgotten* is indebted to the government's earlier Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report, itself already extensively critiqued by Leon Tikly, who has exposed the fact that it is 'flawed in its analysis and limited in its recommendations', and has also made clear that 'the report is best understood as part of a wider ideological effort to advance a reconfigured nationalist project as a response to the wider organic crisis in British capitalism' (Tikly, 2021). The CRED report and *The Forgotten* are both deeply engaged in an ideological battle, and we should not be invoking them as neutral statements of fact on the educational experiences of 'the white working class'.

Critical engagement with the data and framing of *The Forgotten* has not been confined to scholars like Gillborn, who have written widely on the relationship between education and racialisation with a focus on 'whiteness'. Sammy Wright, a head teacher in Sunderland and at the time Social Mobility Commissioner for Schools and Higher Education, responded that 'to focus on the fact that it is the White pupils identified here that are underachieving is to put the cart before the horse', and reminded readers of the report that 'A smaller proportion of White children live in poverty than any other group' (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Responding on behalf of the NEU, Mary Bousted went further:

> It is deeply unhelpful to try and make it harder to talk in schools about racism, which seems to be one intention of the report. Racism is endemic across society and in workplaces and nearly half of Black children are living in poverty . . . Both challenging racism and empowering all working-class students should be at the heart of this next phase of recovery education' (NEU, 2021).

Having uncritically accepted the deeply problematic work of the Education Committee, Dore then proceeds to make a number of evidence-free statements that problematically infer particular characteristics for certain groups of young people and their families, in the process working to racialise educational disadvantage and attach it in particular to the figure of the 'white working class boy'. For instance, Dore asserts that:

> Arguably, whatever information is given about many of the qualifications on offer, many students do not have the knowledge or experience to judge what qualification choices are suitable or aspirational for them. This is specifically the case for white working-class boys.

Why it ought to be the case that white working-class boys, specifically, should be singled out here is unclear. This rhetorical tic of suggesting that issues are especially or specifically relevant to white working-class boys over and above other groups, without supporting evidence, recurs throughout Dore's article. For instance, he suggests that 'Meaningful opportunities for student voice are also important to cultivate students' aspirations and a culture of achievement, especially with white working-class boys'. In similar vein, he notes that, although classrooms are often presented as being entirely 'classless', 'they are arguably not experienced as such by white working-class boys'. Are we to infer from this that Dore believes clasrooms to be experienced as 'classless' by Black working-class students (or white working-class girls, for that matter)?!

Similarly, Dore implies that GCSE examinations have an especially alienating impact on white working-class boys that dissuades them in particular from post-16 education. As he puts it, 'the continuing rigidity of the GCSE exam system eliminates significant numbers

of white working-class boys from accessing study at post-16'. There are certainly serious problems with the way that working-class students experience GCSEs, but to assert that it is primarily white working-class boys who are alienated from education by the GCSE experience is to ignore recent subject-specific research, such as that of the Royal Geographical Society, that has found that 'Apart from white pupils, fewer pupils of all (known) ethnicities entered A Level geography than expected', and that 'There are fairly sizeable disparities in A Level geography entry rates when considered by ethnicity'. Given the significant growth in the number of students from global majority backgrounds studying GCSE geography in recent years, this data suggests that the GCSE experience may be off-putting for such students, hence their lower than average continuation onto A-Level courses.

Geographer Ben Rogaly (2020a) has argued that 'There is a battle underway in England over what the nation stands for and to whom it belongs'. Schools and educational institutions, as Christy Kulz (2017) has made abundantly clear in her book *Factories for Learning*, are sites where racialised and classed identities are manufactured, and as such are at the heart of this battle. One thing that stands out about Dore's article is the way that it reflects a common tendency in writing about the interactions of class and race that was recently highlighted by the CLASS think tank in their report entitled *They Look Down on Us: Insights from the Diverse Working Class on Race and Class in Britain Today*: 'While certain politicians and pundits speak frequently about the 'white working class', working-class migrants and people of colour are rarely, if ever, referred to by their class' (Jesse, 2022). Thus, Dore gives us an article on educational disadvantage that makes almost no mention of the breadth and diversity of the working class, at the same time as it makes claims about the particular negative experiences of 'white working-class boys'.

As the Runnymede Trust argues:

> All children who face class disadvantage deserve the attention and support to improve their educational attainment. Isolating white children as the ones who are 'left behind' - when evidence shows that children from other backgrounds are also 'left behind' - is damaging to all left-behind children (Treloar, 2021).

Indeed. It does us no good as left-wing educators to adopt the rhetorical and ideological positionings of our political opponents uncritically, especially at a time when education policy makers are so invested in problematic approaches to questions of 'race' and racialisation (Gillborn et al, 2022). Working-class students have enough challenges to confront without progressive educators adopting divisive racialised frameworks through which to analyse their attainment or aspirations.

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