

Press Release – CLASS and the Runnymede Trust

Embargoed for 00:01, Wednesday 10th July 2019

London's working class communities feel driven out by gentrification and ignored by public institutions

Working class communities in the capital feel pushed out by gentrification, according to a new report published by leading think-tanks [CLASS](#) (Centre for Labour and Social Studies) and the [Runnymede Trust](#).

The report, ***"We Are Ghosts": Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice***, highlights working class communities experience a "punitive culture" in public services, fuelling alienation, disillusionment and 'rational disengagement' from public authorities that appear to be working against their best interest.

The year-long study, **based on interviews with 78 people across 14 London boroughs**, including North Kensington (where the Grenfell Tower tragedy occurred) found that:

- Most interviewees resented gentrification as it takes 'London space' away from working class communities that have made up the long-standing social fabric of its neighbourhoods, to the benefit of wealthier newcomers.
- Most interviewees, both white and minority ethnic, experienced interactions with public services as punitive and disempowering: from stop and search to benefits sanctions; housing evictions to immigration house raids.
- Identification with the term 'working class' was weak but shared sense of pride in belonging to local neighborhoods was strong - however this community cohesion is threatened by the loss of community spaces caused by gentrification.

Interviewees' comments on gentrification and social cleansing include:

"We're not against urbanizing, we're against gentrification. Don't drive us out to put new housing and new people in. Drive things alongside with us." Aisha, 18, Kensington

"The luxury flats are being built and the social housing is slowly sold off, bit by bit, so I feel like it's pushing us out." Anong, 30s, Kensington

"It's only a matter of time, we're the last generation here. If you're on the bottom of the ladder, you can't even afford to live in social housing because if you're on a low-paid job, you can't even afford social housing." Richard, 60s, Southwark

Case studies are available (see Notes to Editors)

The report argues the working class is not just white but multi-ethnic and includes recent migrants. Working-class communities, white or otherwise, struggle with precarious work (loss of traditional industries and the rise of the low-paid gig economy), with the minority ethnic working class also grappling with the struggle to prove their right to live and work (eg. Windrush scandal).

CLASS and the Runnymede Trust are calling for:

- Policy-makers to re-embed dignity at the core of policy and re-build the safety net for all working-classes.
- A renewed focus on 'race and class' disadvantage and social justice.
- Fostering workers' bargaining power.
- Ending the 'hostile environment' and designing universal public services with the basic premise that people deserve to be treated with care and dignity when navigating the system.

In addition, the report suggests that politicians should stop counter-posing race and class by pitching everyday people against each other, and instead set targets to improve both ethnic minority and working class representation in the workplace and across all institutions.

[Trust for London research](#) shows **27% of Londoners - 2.3 million people - live in poverty** after housing costs are taken into account. That's 700,000 children, 1.4million and 200,000 pensioners - 37% of all children in the capital, 24% of all working-age adults and 19% of all pensioners in the capital.

Dr Omar Khan, Director of the Runnymede Trust, said:

"Our report, based on interviews with nearly 80 Londoners revealed an unheard reality: that London has some of the most significant levels of deprivation and poverty in the UK, and that racism and class prejudice affect millions of people in the capital. Whether they live one mile or 500 miles from parliament, the multi-ethnic working class has been left behind by local and national policies. Tackling race and class inequalities are vital to raise the voices of working Londoners and to provide a better basis for community and justice in the capital."

Dr Faiza Shaheen, Director of CLASS, said:

"This research was born from a desire to fight against the weaponisation of the term 'working class.' For too long we have allowed the term to be used as a way to divide the multi-ethnic working class, creating a hierarchy that only sees the 'authentic' working class as white, male and in the North of England while simultaneously demonising the white working class as lazy and racist."

"The findings in this report highlight just how wrong the dominant narrative on the working class is. Interestingly, not one of the 78 interviewees mentioned Brexit. It's time we drop the class mythology and bring working class communities together to rebalance power in this country."

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Notes to Editors:

1. The report will be launched at 00:01 on Wednesday 10th July 2019. It will be available on www.runnymedetrust.org and www.classonline.org.uk Early copies are available for journalists on request and on embargo (may be subject to change).
2. There will be a launch event on Wednesday 10th July 2019, at 6pm, at Unite the Union, 128 Theobalds Road, London, WC1X 8TN. Speakers include John Harris (Guardian), Reni Eddo-Lodge (award-winning author), Samia Badani (Notting Dale Residents Advisory board), Dr Faiza Shaheen (CLASS), Dr Omar Khan (Runnymede Trust), report author Laurie Mompelat (CLASS and the Runnymede Trust). Contact Lester Holloway or Rahul Verma if you would like to attend. See: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/connecting-the-dots-of-institutional-prejudice-tickets-64298371159?utm_medium=discovery&utm_campaign=social&utm_content=attendeeshare&aff=estw&utm_source=tw&utm_term=listing
3. The new report is a follow-up to an earlier collaboration between the two think tanks on the same topic. In March 2017 we published 'Minority Report: Race and Class in post-Brexit Britain'. See: <http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/minority-report-race-and-class-in-post-brexit-britain>
4. Case studies are available. Contact Lester Holloway or Rahul Verma.
5. The Runnymede Trust is a race equality think-tank. CLASS (Centre for Labour and Social Studies) is a leading left think tank working to ensure policy is on the side of everyday people.