

## Do Gary Dobson and David Norris really have any chance of a fair trial?



I wonder what would happen if I wrote an article for this magazine saying that Gary Dobson and David Norris had nothing to do with the stabbing to death of the black youngster Stephen Lawrence, 18 years ago? And that they are entirely innocent? The two are in court at this moment, charged with the murder of Lawrence, and therefore I would be in contempt of court, having committed what I call a 'Singleton'. (In honour of the former *Blue Peter* and *PM* presenter who once, while interviewing a court reporter in the middle of a murder trial live on air, asked the question: 'So tell me Bob, you've been there all week — do you think he's innocent or guilty?' Bob was silent for a while and then replied: 'Well, y'know Val, I think we'd better leave that question up to the jury'.)

Courts rightly take such matters very seriously, but it would be a singularly perverse judge who took action against me: for the last 18 years the public has been assured that all five of the men originally named as suspects, including Dobson and Norris, were absolutely guilty, bang to rights. And reminded of the fact every so often.

It matters not that Dobson, along with Neil Acourt and Luke Knight, were acquitted in a private prosecution for the crime. They are guilty. They were not convicted because the Metropolitan Police were/are both institutionally racist and corrupt, as well as incompetent. That is what you are supposed to believe, if you are a right-thinking person, regardless of that acquittal. There is a desperate yearning not so much that Stephen Lawrence's killer(s) be brought to justice, but that these five men — two Acourts, Dobson, Knight and Norris — be found guilty. They are proven to have acted in a racist manner, they are — beyond this — not terribly nice people. And somehow their conviction will help to exculpate the rest of us, show that we are a society which does not tolerate racism.

They are corrupting things, racism and its bovine antonym, anti-racism. So good luck to Judge Treacy, presiding over the trial

of Dobson and Norris, in ensuring that the jury start, as he put it, with 'a clean slate'. Of course they cannot possibly do that. I suspect that there has not been a clearer example in the last 100 years of a case which has been brazenly and clearly judged, by press and politicians, in advance. Or where, regardless of the actual facts of the matter, your inclination as to whether they are guilty or not depends upon your political disposition. If you are a liberal, they are guilty. If you are quite right-wing, they are not.

Because there is the counter-argument, although it is not one heard very often because it has nasty side to it and in any

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case is not the sort of thing one should say in public. It is an agglomeration of rumour and half-rumour, fuelled by a resentment that the murder of Stephen Lawrence is given so much more prominence than the killing of a white person by someone of a different colour; a resentment at Neville and Doreen Lawrence, at the Stephen Lawrence Architectural Award and the Stephen Lawrence Centre, at the Macpherson Report and every manifestation of leftish honky-bashing.

Nick Griffin, the leader of the BNP, suggested that far from being an embryonic Sir Norman Foster, Stephen Lawrence was

a 'bully' who 'stole other children's dinner money'. I haven't looked at the BNP's manifesto for a while so I suppose they may now favour capital punishment for stealing dinner money. But the rest of the rumour in far-right circles claims that Lawrence was a 'small-time drug dealer' who may well have been killed by a black accomplice to whom he may have owed money.

And so on, and so on. I don't know how much of this is true. If I were to guess I would say that Lawrence, I suspect, was neither an architect nor a drug dealer but, much like the rest of us, somewhere in between. But it seems to me that rather than being a process which has contributed towards a healing of the rift between our urban black and white populations, the continued determination to find at least some of those five men guilty has stoked the resentment up still further.

Will Dobson and Norris — the son of a drug dealer himself, as it happens; at least two of the five men and probably three have familial connections to fairly big-time sarf lunnon thick-as-mince gangsters — get a fair hearing, do you suppose? Nope, not a chance. About eight years ago Neil Acourt and David Norris were charged with throwing an empty drink carton in the direction of a policeman. They were sentenced to 18 months each in prison — no other charges, that's all it was. I think they received that sentence on account of not being banged up for the murder of Stephen Lawrence, not for throwing a drink carton at a copper. So, much though one has to respect Judge Treacy, I doubt everyone will have that slate of his wiped clean when they come to consider their verdicts.

Should we care about these undoubtedly violent, often criminal, certainly unpleasant white trash? That they were (and probably still are) racists is quite beyond dispute. Maybe, these days, that's enough to convince the rest of us that where legal rights are concerned, they simply do not have any.



'Of course it's all make-believe — there's no such thing as work really.'

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The argument continues...