

With the working class youth – against the police

For five nights running, working class youth have been on the streets fighting the police in running battles. The uprising spread from Tottenham to Hackney, Lewisham, Peckham, Croydon, Clapham and then to Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Bristol. Workers Power stands foursquare with the youth.

The uprisings are an expression of rage at racist police killings, daily police harassment, and underlying it the surge in youth unemployment (23% across London, rising to 80% for black youths in Brixton) and savage cuts in benefits and local services, including cuts in youth services of up to 75% in Haringey.

The shooting of Mark Duggan and the contempt the Tottenham police showed for his family and the peaceful protest on Saturday were just the spark that lit the fuse. On the 30th anniversary of the Brixton Riots of 1981 it was not forgotten by people on the streets and across Tottenham that this most deprived borough is also the scene of the most intensive uprising against the police in the '80s – the Broadwater Farm uprising of 1985.

Police racism

Entirely absent from David Cameron and all political leaders' speeches in the past few days has been any mention of the facts that Mark Duggan was gunned down without having drawn a firearm, that police used dum-dum bullets, designed to cause maximum damage to internal organs, and that police issued lies about the incident to the press in the aftermath to cover their tracks.

Mark was not a one-off victim – 320 (mainly black) people have died in

police custody in the past 10 years, while black youth are 26 times more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts.

It has only taken a few nights of disorder for journalists and politicians to start blaming black parents, as if unemployment, cramped housing, shrinking benefits and the abolition of EMA – not to mention endemic racism – all made it easy for young people to work hard and improve themselves. Back to the 1980s indeed!

Police racism against black people was one but not the only spur to the clash and there are reports that white and even Orthodox Jewish people supported the defence of the peaceful demonstrators after police attacked a 16 year old girl demanding answers to the killing of Mark Duggan, a report systematically excluded from BBC coverage by Monday.

The battle in Tottenham drove back police momentarily sufficient to allow poor local youth to attack shops and steal goods. One arson attack on a store burnt out workers' flats above. Now the risings are spreading across London to Walthamstow, Hackney, Brixton, Enfield, Lewisham and Peckham – and now Birmingham, Manchester and beyond. Some are motivated by hatred of the police and rage at this society – others by the promise of raiding local shops for goods – some by both.

Why did the rioting spread? Youth – especially black and Asian youth – have a similar experience of police violence; the death of Mark Duggan had direct and recent echoes in Brixton and Croydon with the killing of Smiley Culture, and in Birmingham with three deaths in police custody: Demetre Fraser, Kingsley Burrell and Lloyd Butler.

Youth unemployment stands at nearly one million and up to 50% for young black men, with university out of reach, college expensive, courses cut and benefits slashed; all local councils have axed youth services, some by up to 75%. As one Tottenham resident told the BBC, "This how we get change here. After '85 [Broadwater Farm uprising] we got a brand new swimming pool. It wasn't coming here before."

Their justice and ours

How contemptible that the Tories have immediately latched onto the uprising to support giving the police more powers to use plastic bullets and water cannon. The Prime Minister even wants police to ban youths from social network sites, remove masks and spray them with dye.

The government is urging the courts to deliver tougher sentences for minor offences, like the six year sentence

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handed down to an 11 year old child for stealing bottled water. It wants to introduce a new crime of being near a riot – guilt by association. Cameron wants councils to evict tenants who participated in the uprising and Job Centres to withhold their benefits.

How dare they? MPs kept their second homes and their expenses even after they were found guilty of ripping us off for years!

Our stance is clear: we are 100% for the people on the streets and against the police; we support organised self-defence of demonstrations and working class communities; we demand police off the streets; we demand a popular inquiry of delegates from the local community to determine responsibility for the shooting of Mark Duggan and to investigate police racism and corruption; we demand the release of all detainees from the uprisings and the dropping of all charges.

Looters and the real criminals

We oppose looting not from the standpoint of the petit-bourgeois proprietors but from the standpoint of the working class: the lumpenproletarian priority in these situations is to enrich themselves momentarily; the proletarian priority is to unify and strengthen the working class against the state and the system. However, where there has been stealing of basic necessities, like food and clothes, this is entirely understandable.

Looting divides and weakens the working class struggle. So too do attacks on firefighters and paramedics, who are not part of the repressive apparatus but workers, who also face cuts. However, we oppose all police repression and call for organisation of the protests to assert restraint, not police control.

Undoubtedly hardened criminal gangs who have taken advantage of the uprising are no friends of working class communities, but parasites on them. Those who have attacked Asian men defending their communities or Malaysian students to take their phone deserve no defence from the working class, but justice.

However, the racist police and capitalist politicians are useless for the job of driving the gang leaders out of our communities and stopping young people from drifting into their orbit. We support working class and popular self defence groups – as has been seen in

Hackney and Birmingham – against these organised criminal gangs or against the fascists of the English Defence League or the racist police.

However, those in the media and the government who try to reduce the uprising to nothing more than a criminal spree are simply trying to ignore its wider political significance and to deny any connection with the cuts. Attempts by Cameron and the courts to condemn children as young as 11 simply for stealing are despicable and hypocritical, given the criminality of MPs fiddling their expenses, corporations and business leaders evading their taxes, and the banks taking £1 trillion of taxpayers' money then demanding we pay for their crisis.

Who teaches young people to worship material possessions and prize greed? The capitalists do, not parents.

How should we respond?

We call on the labour movement to denounce leading and local Labour politicians who speak out not for the people but for the police, and who always put the voice of local propertied people before the voice of the propertyless youth. We denounce the Blairite David Lammy, MP for Tottenham – whilst Bernie Grant then MP for Tottenham denounced the police aggressors in 1985, today Lammy denounces only the youth. We call on the trade unions to add their support to defence campaigns, to call Labour MPs to account, to back local community inquiries into the real causes of the events.

Above all we demand a real campaign of direct action against unemployment, homelessness and cuts. The whole working class movement should fight for an end to all job cuts, a

massive programme of public spending on useful jobs to rebuild our communities after thirty years of government cuts and vandalism since Thatcher, financed by taxing the rich and expropriating the banks - there is plenty of money in London for this, the most unequal city in the world where the wealthiest ten percent have 273 times the wealth of the poorest ten percent. Ending the whole cuts programme of the Tories including cuts in services and benefits and relemans a general strike to bust the cuts, bring down the Tories and open a fight against this system itself.

The unemployed and the youth are ready to fight – they are showing fearlessness and militancy against the police. We fight for an unemployed workers' union and a revolutionary youth movement.

The explosion of riots across Britain is an historic event, part of a crisis of the system as a whole, which continues across the world. Like the banlieues uprisings in France in 2006 it is a sign of things to come. While thousands of youth take to the streets against a system of hopelessness and despair, the leaders of Britain, America and Europe rot on their feet, unable to prevent the meltdown of their financial system and demanding ever more sacrifices from the people. Out of the mass upheaval, from among the desperate youth and the workers driven to fight, a new revolutionary organisation needs to be assembled, to direct the rage of the people against the cause of our suffering and to fight to take the power.

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