

German Left Party and British Socialist Party slander British youth

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The reactions of the German Left Party and the British Socialist Party group to the youth riots in Britain highlight the true character of these organizations. They openly support the smear campaign of the bourgeois media and political elite towards young people.

They do not utter a single word in the defence of the young people, whom they denigrate as “greedy” and “criminals.” Instead, they appeal to the bourgeois state and the unions in order to reconcile the growing anger of young people and workers with a society that plunges them into poverty and offers no perspective.

In order to justify their right-wing politics these organizations and their mouthpieces resort to the most blatant forms of slander. A particularly shabby article appeared on August 13 in *Neues Deutschland* (ND), formerly the central organ of the Stalinist party of state in East Germany, and currently the mouthpiece of the Left Party. The editorial, entitled “Broken Society”, states, “the looters of plasma TVs embodied the maxim of the Thatcher years, ‘greed is good’” and wanted “above all to get rich quickly, like the stock market speculators and investment bankers”.

After this crude comparison, the editorial does not shrink from even bringing the military into play, and raises the question whether it was not preferable to employ the army, “which is being decimated in Afghanistan and is dropping bombs in Libya”. It would, however, “be out of place in British cities” and was “also numerically too weak for large-scale deployment”, the article concludes.

In the opinion of ND, it is therefore the police that have the appropriate means of challenging the young; the problem was just that “Cameron himself has cut Britain’s police budgets by 20 percent” and that “despite the entreaties of opposition leader Ed Miliband” was clinging fast to the cuts.

The deep-seated hostility of the ND against the young is also clear in the next section. We read that it was “not Karl Marx and Pierre Joseph Proudhon [...] who had inspired the riots”, but “the gurus of consumer society and young men who were infected by mass hysteria.” These men were “dangerous”, even though most appeared in court, “suddenly alone and helpless”.

One must state bluntly: This is the language of the extreme right. It does not differ from that of the British Prime Minister

David Cameron and his conservative supporters who denigrate the youth as “criminals” and equate them with “rats” and “wild beasts”.

The position advocated in ND is not a solitary example from the periphery of the Left Party.

The Left Party’s state association in North Rhine Westphalia has also published an article that regards young people primarily as offenders, and raises the question of who actually benefits “when small shops are looted, whose owners do not exactly belong among the profiteers of the system?” “We learn little about the reasons and motivations of the youth”, the article claims, and like the ND points especially to the consumer behaviour of young people as the cause.

In reality, high unemployment and devastating poverty among broad layers are the cause of social unrest. Decades of social devastation, organized by all the official parties (the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats), have sharpened class antagonisms to breaking point. Contrary to the claim by many bourgeois and “left” media, the insurrectionary youth are not “consumer-mad” affluent kids, but mostly young people between 16 and 24 from impoverished working class neighbourhoods who have been deprived of any perspective of ever escaping poverty.

Official statistics show that nearly 20 percent are unemployed in this age group. The true figures are probably much higher because the 16-18 age group receive no unemployment benefits and so do not show up in statistics. Things are hardly any better for young people who have work. The vast majority of young workers earn little more than the minimum wage. For young people under 20 years old this is less than £5 an hour, and apprentices under 19 can earn as little as £2.50.

These young people are the victims of a criminal elite that has benefited massively from the redistribution of wealth from those at the bottom of society to those at the top, and is conducting illegal wars in Afghanistan and Libya. Now the real criminals are hauling them before the courts in summary proceedings; their families confronted with measures that are reminiscent of the worst excesses of a police state.

Some 3,000 people, the majority between 16 and 24, were recently subjected to police raids at their homes. The names and photos of people who are not accused of any specific offence

are shown daily in the media. Over 1,500 youths have been convicted in summary proceedings and face draconian punishments; mothers and pregnant women arrested for theft face six months imprisonment. A student convicted for stealing bottled water with a value of £3.50 was also sentenced to six months in prison.

It is not uncommon for entire families to be taken into custody. Family members of alleged suspects can have their welfare benefits removed and be thrown out of their homes. What Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (and now also heading the “gangs task force”), announced a few days ago has already become a brutal reality for many families. He threatened that the police would knock on the doors of alleged gang leaders and “make life hell” for them. Local councils are being encouraged to throw the families of alleged looters out of their council houses.

This programme of class justice is being implemented primarily by councils governed by the Labour Party. Under the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the Labour Party, with the help of the unions, viciously attacked the social gains of the working class; now prominent Labour representatives and so-called “lefts” such as Ken Livingstone and Diane Abbott are demanding more police and the use of water cannons.

The youth riots are a distorted expression of the class struggle and have driven the entire bourgeois establishment even further to the right. All the parties that defend capitalism are slandering the youth as criminals, and use this argument as justification for massively increasing the powers of the bourgeois state and the dismantling of democratic rights.

A key role in pushing through this policy is played by the pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Party, the British sister party of the SAV in Germany. From the beginning, representatives of this group have been involved in the bourgeois media’s smear campaign, presenting the unrest not as an expression of social revolt, but as a criminal act. Articles by the Socialist Party and the SAV regularly refer to the youth as “looters”, “arsonists” and “criminals”.

The Socialist Party also seems to have no fundamental problems with the beefing up of the state. Water cannons were “useless in this kind of situation because they cannot be everywhere at once,” it says in one of their articles. A Socialist Party representative only spoke out against a “strengthening of the security forces” because they “do not contribute to an improvement of the situation” and could “later also be used against striking workers and social movements”.

But this is exactly what is happening at present—with the active support of the Socialist Party. In none of its publications does it call for the defence of the democratic and social rights of young people and demand the prosecution of those truly responsible, the bankers and speculators and their stooges in politics.

On the contrary, the Socialist Party and the SAV make young

people themselves responsible for the government offensive. An article by Judy Beishon on the web site of the Socialist Party states, “The outburst of unorganised groups and individuals acting in a chaotic, disorganised way caused the forces of the state to be temporarily overstretched.”

Despite all their phrases, the Socialist Party and SAV see their task as warning the criminal elite and offering helpful advice in the oppression of the youth and the working class. What distinguishes them from the politics of Cameron is simply the belief that you can keep the working class better under control in collaboration with Labour and the unions.

In an article published on the SAV website on 12 August, Hannah Sell, the deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, pointed to “the extreme myopia of the current government.” It is “cutting back on measures that give the government a certain social control over young people”.

Driven by “the danger” that soon “new unrest [could] flare up”, the Socialist Party demands the unions “now act decisively.” The TUC should organise “a nationwide trade union demonstration immediately.”

But workers and young people have already made experiences worldwide with the unions’ “large-scale demonstrations”. They are not a means for workers to assert their interests, but are organized by the bureaucrats to maintain their control over the workers, and enforce the cuts against them. In reality, it is the responsibility of the unions and their pseudo-left supporters that young people now turn to violent revolt.

Against the backdrop of the intensification of the capitalist crisis and the outbreak of global class struggles, the pseudo-left groups have turned into open representatives of the bourgeois state and its repressive apparatus. Nobody should be fooled by the demagogic phrases behind which they hide their righting politics.

The only party that has defended the British youth and shows them a way forward is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world party of international socialism, and its British section the Socialist Equality Party.

The German section of the ICFI, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) has organised a meeting at Hermann Platz in Berlin-Neukölln on 20th August in defence of the British youth. Neukölln is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Berlin; ten years of an SPD-Left Party city legislature, backed by the SAV, has plunged a whole generation of young people into abject poverty and created the social conditions that barely differ from those in London.



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