

The stench of a police state

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The events of the last 12 days are a warning to the working class in Britain and internationally. The state repression and right-wing hysteria unleashed in response to youth rioting in London and other cities reveal the preparations of the ruling class for police-state forms of rule.

The riots were triggered by the police execution of Mark Duggan, a black 29-year-old father of four, in Tottenham, north London on August 4, followed by an unprovoked police assault on a peaceful protest over his killing two days later. Almost a fortnight later, no officer has been identified, let alone charged, for these crimes.

Instead, the political elites who sanctioned the looting of public funds to bail out the banks and the super-rich, and who covered up the illegal phone hacking of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, have sought to whip up a lynch mob atmosphere against the "criminality" and "immorality" of working class youth.

Cheered on by the Labour Party, Prime Minister David Cameron and his Conservative-Liberal Democrat government have organized vicious state repression, authorizing the use of water cannons and plastic bullets and the possible use of the army against further social unrest.

Basic democratic rights have been thrown to the winds. The presumption of innocence has been jettisoned as police carry out mass arrests, with those detained subject to show trials presided over by courts acting directly at the behest of the authorities.

Some 3,000 people, the majority aged between 16 and 24, have been rounded up in sweeps across the capital and elsewhere, with police battering down the doors of people's homes for what are, in the main, petty misdemeanours. The names and photographs of people not even charged with any offence—let alone found guilty—are broadcast daily by the media. Juvenile defendants, some as young as 11, have been stripped of

their right to anonymity.

Magistrates have been told they can "ignore the rule book" on sentencing norms, following what the chair of one London magistrates court inadvertently described as a government "directive." Over 1,500 people have to date been dragged before courts—in some instances sitting for 24 hours at a time—where, with paperwork barely completed and a shortage of solicitors, the most vindictive and punitive sentences are being handed down.

Even though many of those appearing in court have no previous convictions, over two-thirds have been denied bail. Mothers and pregnant women have been incarcerated for six months for handling stolen goods. So too has a student, with no criminal record, for stealing bottles of water worth £3.50.

They are just the first of many others facing summary justice. Hundreds more young people are being remanded for months at a time to await trial before crown courts that can impose more draconian punishments, including up to ten years for rioting.

Collective punishment is the order of the day, with reprisals underway against the family members of those allegedly involved in the disturbances. Without any proof of guilt, mothers and young children are being served with notices of eviction from their council housing, while plans are made to strip people accused of involvement in the riots of their welfare benefits, even if they are not convicted of any offence.

Last week it was revealed that as the disturbances swept London, police broke into encrypted social messaging networks, gaining access to the mobile phones of hundreds of people and their messages. They had even prepared to close down BlackBerry messaging and Twitter. Simultaneously, the government brought in MI5 and the giant eavesdropping national security centre GCHQ to access electronic communications.

This same ruling elite sings the praises of the social media to undermine governments in other countries when it suits its foreign policy interests. It promoted the so-called “twitter” revolution in Iran as part of US-backed efforts to overthrow President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and install a more pro-Western regime. On its own turf, however, it reacts ruthlessly to any form of communication not controlled by the state.

All this is legitimized by the branding of working class youth as “feral rats” and “wild beasts.” Anything now passes as acceptable discourse, as representatives of both the right and “left” of official bourgeois politics denounce a “criminal underclass,” supposedly generated by the welfare state and “multi-culturalism.” Similar statements can be found in the fascistic manifesto issued by Anders Behring Breivik before he slaughtered 76 people, mainly youth, in Norway last month.

On the BBC, the historian David Starkey recently proclaimed that the proto-fascist Tory politician Enoch Powell was correct when he warned in the 1960s that immigration would lead to civil unrest. Powell’s mistake was to consider that this would be the result of inter-racial violence, Starkey asserted, when what has actually happened is that white working class youth “have become black,” taken over by a “black” culture that has “intruded in England,” which is “why so many of us have this sense literally of a foreign country.”

Though Starkey characteristically uses racial terms to denote the targets of his hatred, he clearly is using the term “black” to denounce all working class youth.

This hostility is shared by the liberal establishment and the corrupt purveyors of identity politics. One-time civil liberty advocates such as Ian Dunt, editor of *politics.co.uk*, declare that their previous injunctions against authoritarian measures must be abandoned. Having caught “a glimpse of the breakdown of society,” Dunt writes, we “must show we understand the need for tougher sanctions.”

Ken Livingstone and Dianne Abbott, prominent representatives of Labour’s so-called “left,” call for greater police numbers and the use of water cannons, while its minority commentators, who for years have milked racial politics to feather their nests, demand greater repression. Derrick Campbell, chief executive of race equality in Sandwell, West Midlands, calls for youth to be birched.

The hysteria sweeping the political elite cannot be attributed solely to last week’s unrest. The bourgeoisie is aware that it has entered a second stage in the global crisis of capitalism that will exacerbate the class divisions already exposed across Europe, the Middle East and internationally, producing enormous shocks and upheavals.

They see in the disturbances in England only a foretaste of what is to come and are panicked by their own political unpreparedness. In private, they have asked themselves again and again how much longer the Labour Party, the trade unions and the life-style “left” can contain popular opposition to deteriorating social conditions and savage spending cuts. In the eruption of social anger among the youth they see a frightening precursor to a much broader movement of the working class.

Their reaction to the riots makes clear that their response to the eruption of class struggles against the economic catastrophe caused by the failure of the capitalist system will be to junk democratic rights and rely on naked state violence.

The most far-reaching political conclusions must be drawn. Only the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism can provide a way out for the working class and the youth from a future of poverty, unemployment, war and dictatorship.

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