

Oppose state repression of British youth

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The elemental eruption of social anger that has swept London and other British cities in recent days has exposed the entrenched poverty, discrimination and police brutality faced daily by many working class youth.

The response of the entire political establishment and the media is to exclude any discussion of these conditions. In unison they insist that the riots and the instances of looting that have taken place are solely the consequence of a large “criminal underclass” of young people that “infests” the inner-cities and must be dealt with ruthlessly.

This is a slander against the youth. Those self-appointed custodians of morality who promote it—hypocrites of the first order!—fail to consider the implications of their own lies. What judgement is to be made of a social system that produces an entire generation of criminals?

The fact is that for 35 years the ruling elite and their political representatives have carried out a war against society. Every aspect of life has been subordinated to the interests of a parasitic financial elite that has looted public assets without restraint, leaving record levels of inequality and deprivation in their wake.

The immense social distress that presently prevails is set to worsen dramatically. It is no coincidence that the backdrop to the youth revolts is a new meltdown of the world’s stock markets. An orgy of speculation and greed on the part of a small, super-rich elite has produced an economic catastrophe.

In Britain, as elsewhere, the response of the ruling elite to the breakdown of capitalism is the imposition of austerity measures that will further impoverish tens of millions of people. This class war policy underlies the vicious response of the political establishment and the media to the disturbances. Their aim is to whip up the most reactionary elements so as to justify mass state repression and even more draconian attacks on social conditions.

That is why Prime Minister David Cameron is invoking the “rule of law” to sanction the use of water cannons and plastic bullets. It is the same reason that Labour leader Ed

Miliband, whose party while in government helped create the appalling social conditions against which young people are rebelling, demands the “strongest possible police response.”

Their denunciations of the “criminality” and “immorality” of the young are staggering in their cynicism and hypocrisy.

They are made by the representatives of a bourgeoisie that is waging criminal wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Libya in which innocent civilians are killed daily. The very politicians—beginning with Cameron—who wax eloquent about morality have been exposed as the political bagmen of the multi-billionaire arch-reactionary Rupert Murdoch, whose *News of the World* was involved in criminality on an industrial scale, including the systematic bribery of the Metropolitan Police, the very force that is now being let loose on the streets of London to attack working class youth with impunity.

No action has been taken against Murdoch or any of his executives and bribed police officers—nor is any demanded. Murdoch and his son James are treated with grovelling deference by the politicians of all official parties as well as the media.

In all the condemnation of “lawlessness,” virtually no mention is made of Mark Duggan, the 29-year-old father of four whose fatal shooting by police last Thursday triggered the riots. There are no calls to bring to justice the police officer who murdered him.

Nor has a word of criticism been made of the mass arrests taking place across the country. Almost 2,000 people have been rounded up so far in the course of mass police sweeps in which young protesters have been indiscriminately attacked and seized. Courts are presently sitting through the night to process people charged with petty crimes, many of whom have been refused bail.

There is more than a whiff of fascism in the repeated appeals to “property owners” and “respectable citizens” to “take back the streets” from those described as “feral rats.” Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Max Hastings described

the youth involved in the disturbances as “wild beasts” who “respond only to instinctive animal impulses.” In the early 19th century, Hastings continued, with undisguised approval, “spasmodic outbreaks of violence” by the “underclass” were dealt with “by force and draconian legal sanctions, foremost among them capital punishment and transportation to the colonies.”

In contrast, he complained bitterly, “Today, those at the bottom of society behave no better than their forebears, but the welfare state has relieved them from hunger and real want.”

Such racist and fascistic rants are legitimized and disseminated by the “respectable” bourgeois press, while right-wing forces such as “libertarian” Paul Staines circulate electronic petitions to demand the restoration of the death penalty.

The re-called parliament is set to discuss stripping all unemployed people involved in the riots of their welfare entitlements, while the riots are being used to test out domestic counterinsurgency measures in preparation for the far broader struggles of the working class that are foreshadowed by these events.

The youth revolts have above all brought into the open the contemptible and reactionary character of those who style themselves as “liberals” and even “lefts.” For years these privileged middle-class layers have accommodated themselves to rising social inequality. Utterly indifferent to the impoverishment of broad layers of the population, their “progressive” credentials are based entirely on their championing of lifestyle politics and various forms of petty bourgeois identity politics.

Their reaction to the inner-city rebellions is one of intense fear and loathing. Labour’s Ken Livingstone—once known as “Red Ken”—was amongst the first to call for the deployment of water cannons, while the black and Asian Labour MP’s and assorted “community leaders” who have utilized racial politics to bolster their careers and bank balances are the most vociferous in insisting that poverty is “no excuse” for rioting and that the police must respond with force.

Ian Dunt, editor of *politics.co.uk*, articulated the outlook of such layers most explicitly. In the past, he wrote, “those of us who consider ourselves civil liberties advocates” had been wary of calls for law and order by “authoritarians.” But not anymore. “Let’s be clear, we have seen a glimpse of the breakdown of society,” he continued. We “must show we understand the need for tougher sanctions when they are genuinely needed to protect the public, or else we’re just fanatics with no grasp

of reality.”

Such statements speak to the political tragedy of the youth. Their entirely justified indignation has been unable to find any organized, progressive expression because of the utter rottenness and bankruptcy of the Labour Party and the various “left” tendencies. There is nothing fundamentally that separates these organisations from the Conservative Party and the right wing more generally. They simply speak for different sections of the same privileged elite.

As for the trade unions, their systematic efforts to sabotage and strangle any opposition to the government and its austerity measures have played a central role in isolating the youth, leaving them feeling frustrated and helpless.

The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally condemns the police assault that has been unleashed against young people and demands the immediate withdrawal of riot police from the areas they now occupy. Those held on petty charges must be released immediately without any further repercussions.

To the youth we say: all the resources you need to lead the fulfilling and productive lives to which you are entitled—well-paid jobs, free education, access to culture, sport and leisure and other essential provisions—can be attained, but only by challenging the monopoly exercised over society by the super-rich and their three political parties—Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat.

Your allies in this struggle are the working people in Britain and internationally. The working class—your class—is the only social force capable of overthrowing the capitalist system and reorganising economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

To workers and those genuinely concerned with democratic rights and the fight for social equality we say: come to the defence of the youth. Show them the way out of the nightmarish future of poverty, unemployment and war which capitalism offers.

To workers and youth alike we say: read about and study socialism and the history of the Marxist movement and take up the fight to build the Socialist Equality Party as the new revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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