

Media demand mass arrests, reprisals against UK rioters

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Magistrates' courts in London and other cities in England are handing down the harshest possible sentences to those accused of involvement in the riots that swept across London and other cities in England earlier this week.

Courts in London, Birmingham and Manchester are sitting 24 hours around the clock to process the vast numbers of those arrested in ongoing police sweeps. Around 2,000 people have been arrested nationally since the disturbances first broke out last Saturday in Tottenham, near London, following a peaceful protest against the police shooting of 29-year-old Mark Duggan.

More than 1,000 people have been detained in London alone, of which 600 have so far been charged. The numbers are set to rise, as a mass witch-hunt is underway to hunt down those accused of involvement in the riots. Films of police smashing down front doors and arresting people have been looped on news channels; in Birmingham 18-foot-high CCTV images of those suspected of involvement are being driven around the city centre on a "digi-van".

Lengthy jail sentences have already been handed down, most for petty offences. In Manchester, a man is being held for sentencing, accused of "stealing items worth £1" from a newsagent.

A 20-year old dental nurse, accused of stealing from a supermarket, was jailed for three months at a London court. A 23-year-old male student from London, who was convicted of stealing six bottles of water worth £3.50, was sentenced to six months. As with many others, he has no prior criminal record.

Another 20-year-old man from Manchester received a six-month prison sentence after admitting carrying bags with the intention of gathering training shoes left in the street following the riots.

Children as young as 11 are being fast-tracked to trial. One 12-year old boy accused of stealing a bottle of wine was given a nine-month supervision order and ordered to pay £50 costs.

The media and police are demanding the law be changed so that "child looters" can be given even harsher, custodial sentences. The *Daily Mail* complained, "Child looters are being freed and allowed to return home to their families—and because of their age the law dictates their identities have to be protected."

The deaths of three men in Birmingham on Tuesday, reportedly hit by a car while they guarded a petrol station from looting, have been seized on to justify this mass repression.

The barest pretence of due process is taking place, as kangaroo courts issue summary justice to satisfy the media and the police. The *Evening Standard* described how at Westminster magistrates' court, one of the four sitting for 24 hours in the city, "Court papers were skim-read in 15 minutes before hearings" while "defendants appeared in the dock when their solicitors were still in the cells with other clients."

The *Guardian* revealed that "of the 1.7m cases heard in magistrates' courts last year, only 3.5 percent were remanded to jail". In the last days those being accused of rioting are being jailed at a "rate of 50-60 percent".

Even so, many cases are being transferred from the magistrates' courts to the crown courts, as judges claim that the maximum powers of sentencing available to them are insufficient. Magistrates' courts can sentence people only for up to six months in prison, or impose a £5,000 fine. For burglary a crown court can impose a sentence of up to 10 years imprisonment.

A solicitor at Westminster Court told the *Guardian* that in many cases people who would normally be released on bail are being routinely remanded in custody. "The decisions seem to be being taken in a routine manner without enough consideration for the distinct factors of each case. It certainly seems to me that it is being motivated by political pressure."

According to the newspaper's analysis of more than 150 cases heard by the courts, the majority of defendants, who are "overwhelmingly young, male and unemployed", are being remanded in custody despite having pled guilty to

relatively minor offences.

The Metropolitan Police said Thursday that roughly half of those who appeared in court in London were aged 18 and under. Of 224 accused, 133 (55 percent) were between the ages of 18 to 24. Significantly, this is the age group nationally that faces especially high levels of unemployment and poverty. Figures released in the last quarter found that one in five (745,000) 18- to 24-years-olds was jobless.

Prime Minister David Cameron and Labour Party leader Ed Miliband are united in their insistence that the riots are solely due to “criminal” and “immoral” street “gangs” who must be suppressed with the “full force” of the law. On Thursday, an emergency sitting of Parliament allowed the police to act with impunity. It set out a range of punitive sanctions against those accused of involvement in the disturbances, including the withdrawal of welfare benefits and eviction from council housing.

In doing so, the political establishment is encouraging the most reactionary and sadistic forces.

Any slander against working class youth can now be repeated without challenge in the media—with some openly calling for violent reprisals.

Writing in the *Daily Mail* Friday, Richard Littlejohn described those being arrested as “a wolfpack of feral inner-city waifs and strays”. He said, “The realisation is finally dawning in some quarters that we’re now into the third, or even fourth generation of inner-city underclass”.

Echoing those who have called for the army to be brought onto the streets to “restore order”, Littlejohn complained, “The police are hamstrung by legislation and terrified of being accused of racism. So it’s hardly surprising that instead of clubbing these looters like baby seals, which is what they deserved, they initially stood back and watched while shops were plundered and homes burned down.”

Earlier, his fellow *Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips penned a similarly vicious diatribe in which she ascribed the rioting to “the all-too-predictable outcome of a three-decade liberal experiment which tore up virtually every basic social value”. Repeating Cameron’s assertion that Britain was being held to ransom by a “sick” section of society, she identified the cause of this “sickness” as the “welfare state”, the “liberal intelligentsia” and “multiculturalism”, in that order.

In the *Daily Express*, political commentator Chris Roycroft-Davis also attacked a “so-called intelligentsia” whose “social engineering” had changed “our nation” “beyond recognition”.

He called for a “mighty outburst of anger from the millions of men and women who know what morality means”, who “must be allowed to take back the streets, meet violence with violence. If some of the mob get hurt then that’s their own fault”.

Consider the implications of such statements.

It is just three weeks since the Norwegian fascist Anders Breivik committed mass murder by setting off a bomb in downtown Oslo and then gunning down scores of children at a camp of the Norwegian Labour Party.

The “manifesto” Breivik circulated justifying his actions used identical terms to Phillips, et al—denouncing the “liberal elite”, “multi-culturalism” and “welfare dependency” for supposedly destroying Norwegian society.

Breivik cited Phillips, among a host of other British columnists, as one of his inspirations, reproducing a 2009 *Mail* article by her in full.

Lessons must be drawn from this. The outpourings of Breivik, Phillips and others are indicative of a fascistic layer cultivated within Britain and Europe that is both fearful of and intensely hostile to the working class, particularly its younger generation.

They have been encouraged by the criminal wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and the anti-Muslim rhetoric that has accompanied them, and emboldened by the utter rottenness and bankruptcy of social democracy, which has adopted the economic and social policies of the right wing.

They are fully aware of the acute social deprivation that lies behind the riots, and they know that the breakdown of the capitalist system will exacerbate this enormously, inevitably provoking mass working class opposition.

Their demands for mass repression against the youth are the stepping stone on the path to the imposition of dictatorial forms of rule with which they hope to meet such developments.



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