

Scottish government aided suppression of youth riots

Steve James
25 August 2011

The Scottish National Party (SNP) government in Edinburgh despatched riot police earlier in August to assist police forces in England with the suppression of youth riots in major cities. Some 250 officers equipped with riot gear and 30 armoured police vans, from all eight Scottish police forces, were marshalled near Glasgow, then deployed across the North of England and the West Midlands.

The riots followed the unprovoked police killing of Mark Duggan on the streets of Tottenham, London. They expressed, in an angry and confused form, the hostility and alienation of young people from the authorities along with deep frustrations over the absence of career, education and life opportunities for an entire generation.

The state response, which has now seen 3,300 arrests and imprisonments and an unprecedented deluge of media bile, indicated the type of police-state measures that will be employed in the event of mass protests against austerity measures that must emerge in the near future.

The response from Edinburgh was driven by the same considerations. The SNP, despite its professed demands for independence, is more than ready to send police to break the heads of youth across England because it sees itself as a loyal ally of the British state in any conflict with the working class.

The police operation organised by the Scottish government and the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (ACPOS) was described by an ACPOS spokesman as a “mutual aid” deployment. Scottish First Minister and SNP leader Alex Salmond told the BBC, “Obviously we’ve got an obligation to help if we can, and that’s what’s being done”.

Conservative Scotland Office Minister David Mundell agreed, congratulating Salmond. “We need to

band together in times of adversity,” he said.

In the days following riots on London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol, the authorities in Scotland were preparing to confront comparable outbreaks in Scottish towns and cities. Salmond nervously took to the airwaves to demand the media describe the riots as a purely English phenomenon.

Scotland, according to Salmond, was a “different” society. He went on, “One of the many frustrations...was to see the events being described on the BBC network and Sky as riots in the UK. Until such time as we do have a riot in Scotland, then what we have seen are riots in London and in English cities.”

Salmond nevertheless warned that despite the riot police deployment, the Scottish authorities would retain “the capacity to deal with any situation that might arise in Scotland”.

In total, the Scottish police number some 17,000 officers, a great number of whom were highly visibly deployed in working class areas over the weekends following the riots in England.

The Scottish authorities also revealed a social networking spying operation, with a number of young people arrested and denied bail.

On August 8, a 16-year-old from Glasgow was arrested and detained for allegedly creating a Facebook page, “Let’s start a riot in Glasgow”. A spokeswoman for Strathclyde Police crowed to the press, warning, “We will take any action necessary to prevent this kind of abhorrent behaviour. The action we took today should act as a strong warning to anyone who is thinking of causing trouble here.”

An 18-year-old was also arrested in Dundee. Two days later, three more Dundee youth, including a 14-year-old, were arrested. A 19-year-old was arrested in the small town of Kirkcaldy, all for the same

offences. Over the same period, a police station in Aberdeen was petrol bombed.

The Scottish government is aware that all the tensions that generated the youth revolt in England exist in full measure north of the border. Although Scotland has a somewhat higher level of social spending than England, most major towns and cities have areas of endemic, long-standing bitter poverty and high unemployment.

Across Scotland, with a population of just over 5 million, some 36,000 youth between the ages of 16 and 19 are not in education, have no job and are not being trained for anything. Approximately 120,000 people have never had a job, compared with 102,800 in 2004. Official unemployment is 7.7 percent, some 209,000 people, compared with the UK figure of 7.9 percent. Economic inactivity, which includes disabled and sick adults, is running at 22 percent, again similar to the all-UK figure of 23.1 percent.

In some areas, particularly in and around the former industrial centre of Glasgow, the official unemployment rate is over 10 percent, while economic inactivity is as high as 37.9 percent. Between 2007 and 2010, unemployment increased by over 4 percent in North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow City and West Dunbartonshire. Across Scotland, in 2010 alone, 17,500 people were made redundant, 71 percent of whom remain out of work.

This is before the full impact of the SNP government's drastic cuts programme, implemented in tandem with the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition in London and serving the interests of the same financial oligarchy, makes itself felt. Fully 11,600 of those made unemployed this year were from the public sector, and 50,000 more are expected to lose their jobs by 2015. Some £1.3 billion is being cut from public spending this year alone. Annual cuts of £3 billion are anticipated by 2014. This will impact drastically on the most vulnerable.

Salmond's claim that the riots and the circumstances that gave rise to them are an English phenomenon doesn't stand the briefest scrutiny. Commentators who fully agreed with the police and media clampdown warned that Salmond was on dangerously complacent ground and urged vigilance.

Former *Scotsman* editor Magnus Linklater stated in Rupert Murdoch's *Times*, "To argue that a country which has had its own share of sectarian violence, gang

warfare, vandalism and social disruption is somehow immune to wider outbreaks of disorder, is tempting fate."

Writing in the *Herald*, Iain McWhirter, journalist and rector of Edinburgh University, put the same view in patrician and crudely nationalist terms. "The Scottish job doesn't tend to follow a lead given by the English, which I fear may explain the lack of copycat violence in Glasgow or Aberdeen," he declared.

The ex-left played their part in covering the SNP's exposed rump. The latest edition of the Scottish Socialist Party's (SSP's) newspaper, the *Scottish Socialist Voice*, was published with a banner headline, "England's Burning". But in three pages of coverage of the riots, the SSP did not once mention the SNP's use of Scottish riot police against working class youth in England. Neither did it mention the Facebook-related arrests in Scotland.

The SSP's silence is determined by its orientation to the SNP, for which it serves as cheerleader, and its role as apologists for the Scottish state apparatus. This constitutes de-facto support for the "mutual aid" offered to the police forces in England.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact