

30,000 arrests planned

# London neighbourhoods terrorized by police raids

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One month after major disturbances were provoked by the August 4 police killing of Mark Duggan in north London, the Metropolitan Police in the capital are intensifying raids on working class communities.

Entire neighbourhoods have been sealed off, with riot police smashing down doors and dragging people away. So far this has resulted in over 2,000 arrests in London alone, averaging approximately 100 a day since the riots began. The media, tipped off in advance, has filmed the build-up, the actual raids and the spectacle of youth being thrown into police vans.

A police source told the *Sunday Times* that the police are hunting 30,000 people they say were involved in the disturbances. Nationally, 40,000 hours of CCTV footage will be examined and senior police officers are expecting the investigation to last for years.

On August 22, the Metropolitan Police issued a report claiming 3,296 crimes recorded in London. A police source said the “Met is keen to find out who all these people are.”

The Metropolitan Police, backed by the entire political establishment, have been on the rampage since the riots began. On August 11, fifty officers raided the Churchill Gardens Estate in Pimlico, Westminster. The *Daily Telegraph* published film footage of the raid, baying that “England's smash-and-grabbers got a dose of their own medicine today.”

The *Daily Telegraph* wrote: “At one operation briefing, a Scotland Yard police chief ordered officers to keep the horror sustained by Britons in mind as they hit back in a firm but ‘legally robust manner.’”

On the same day, a raid on a Lambeth council estate involved 120 riot police smashing down doors and dragging away youth. Superintendent Nick Sedgemore,

who led the raid, issued a statement declaring: “We are going to come and get them, every single one of them, and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law... We are not worrying about criminalising a section of society. We are not here to be liked, we are here to be respected... We have had enough. We are putting a bit of fear into it.”

These raids were among 100 mounted that same day. A typical statement from the Metropolitan Police web site went as follows:

“In response to Operation Withern, the MPS’ [Metropolitan Police Service’s] investigation following the London disorder, Lambeth Local Policing Teams and specialist search officers conducted estate sweeps in Stockwell and Brixton recovering numerous weapons and evidence of criminality. Saturday 14 August saw officers search the grounds of Stockwell Gardens Estate SW9 supervised by Detective Sergeant Lucas. They found three knives, one claw hammer, one mobile phone and an amount of illegal drugs. Sunday 15 August saw officers search the grounds of the Moorland Estate SW9.”

An example of the abuses committed are the virtually unreported and traumatic events surrounding a Metropolitan Police armed raid on the Gardener family home in Harlesden, northwest London. At 2:00 am on August 16, based on an anonymous tip, a large number of armed officers burst into the family home of Leonie Reece and Delroy Gardener through the front and back doors, while he and his partner watched television in bed and their three children slept.

Guns were pointed in their faces, including their three-year-old son Zion, who woke up in a state of terror. The family were ordered out of the house in their underwear

by armed officers, including their ten-month-old child who was recovering from pneumonia. Their house was completely wrecked.

Leonie Reece, 25, suffered a severe asthma attack and was eventually taken away in an ambulance. She described the scene: “My son then froze... He wouldn’t go out as the guns were all pointing towards us. I was so fearful I struggled to breathe. My three-year-old son was running up and down confused and wouldn’t go out the door because they were shouting and pointing the gun at him.”

Leonie’s partner, Delroy Gardener, a local youth worker, said, “It was like something out of a horror movie... The police were all in masks and all you could see was their eyes. I thought they were armed robbers when they busted in because they were wearing plain clothes. It was only when they took me outside that I saw police in uniform. The whole thing was extremely terrifying... It’s like a tornado hit our home.”

“The police patronised me later like nothing happened by saying ‘have a nice day,’” he continued. “They claimed that they had an anonymous tip off and that I was a looter with firearms, but how did the person who made the allegations come to this conclusion?”

“People are basically being victimized based on other people’s accusations. My grievance is, if they did this without evidence of truth and just on hearsay, no one is safe in their house. This could happen to anyone.”

Gardner said the experience of having a gun pointed at him had traumatised his son, Zion:

“Zion was petrified and now wets himself all the time and has night terrors.”

This naked class vengeance involves all the institutions of the state.

Eoin McLennan-Murray, president of the Prison Governors Association (PGA), said of magistrates, “It’s like when you’ve got sharks and there’s blood in the water and it’s a feeding frenzy. There’s a sentencing frenzy and we seem to have lost all sight of proportionality. It’s appealing to the populist mentality, and that’s not the best basis on which to sentence people.

“The norms of sentencing are being ignored... This kind of speedy across-the-board justice probably means a number of people are dealt with unfairly.”

McLennan-Murray’s statement was in response to

the prison population rising by more than 1,000 to a new record high for the third week in a row and just short of its operational capacity at approximately 87,000.

The BBC analysed the most recent Ministry of Justice statistics relating to people arrested for alleged involvement in disturbances. They estimated that 70 percent of those arrested were remanded in custody, compared with 2010, when only 10 percent of those appearing before magistrates’ courts were remanded in custody. Of those sentenced related to the disturbances, 46 percent received a custodial sentence. In 2010 for equivalent offences, 12.3 percent were given custodial sentences.

In response, prison authorities are working at “developing contingencies to increase usable capacity should further pressure be placed on the prison estate.” The setting up of prison ships is one proposal.

Miscarriages of justice and abuses of human rights are occurring throughout the country. Yet the main human rights organisations have not made any significant response to the abuses and denial of due process to those arrested and imprisoned by courts operating through the night.

The police and media, whose extensive connections to criminal activity were revealed in the Murdoch phone hacking scandal, are given a free hand to coordinate their response in reporting mass arrests. Typical was the *Daily Mail* on August 12, which wrote, “After days of being pelted with bricks and petrol bombs, this was payback time.”



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