

“Are we paying people just to come and kill us?”

London family subject to brutal police raid speaks out

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The riots triggered by the police killing of Mark Duggan on August 4 have unleashed a wave of legal repression, including numerous raids by armed response units seeking to arrest alleged rioters. Among the innocent caught up in this trawl were Delroy Gardner and Leonie Reece, when their family home in Harlesden, northwest London was targeted.

Gardner is a local community youth worker. Members of a church, they have tried, as Delroy put it, “to live a quiet decent life”, offering positive opportunities for their three young children.

The couple were in bed watching a film when armed police battered down the front door. Delroy was handcuffed at gunpoint and held in a police van. Leonie suffered a panic attack.

The children were forced from the house by armed officers. Their 10-month old son Rio, who had recently suffered a chest infection, was kept outside wearing just his vest. Police prevented neighbours coming out to assist him or the family.

Delroy told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I’ve never seen anything like it in all my life”.

At about 2am on Wednesday August 17, they heard banging. Thinking someone was trying to break in, Delroy went downstairs. As he reached the foot of the stairs there was a bigger bang. The door gave way slightly, allowing Delroy to see guns outside. There was another bang and the door came off.

Delroy described the scene: “I was looking at about eight to nine armed men. There was no indication that they were police. They were all in balaclavas. All I could see were eyes and guns. There were lights and the guns pointing all over my body. There were men on their marks

already. There was a man on his knees all ready to shoot. A man was stooping down, a man was covering him. A man was over my neighbour’s drive covering the ones at the doorway. They blocked off the road from the bottom to the top, back and front.”

Speaking quietly because of the shock, Delroy told the gunmen, “You can’t do this because I’ve got my kids in the house.”

At this point they started shouting, “Armed police! Turn around and put your hands on your head”.

Delroy did so, but still had no real indication as to the identity of the gunmen beyond their shouted instructions:

“I still need to know who these people are. These guys I’ve seen [before] actually have a little logo that says ‘Police’. But these guys were clean as a penny, they had nothing. They could be a random guy on the street as far as I’m concerned. They could be anybody.”

Of the cars outside, family members said, only one was marked as a police vehicle, and they only saw four officers with identifying logos. No officer showed them any identification. Delroy described his confusion about who they were:

“No one came to me, even when they finished, and showed us a badge. I don’t know who is who.”

Delroy thought he was going to be killed. The officers handcuffed him and took him to an unmarked car down the road. His wrists are still swollen from the cuffs.

Leonie was still sitting on her bed and saw the lights of the gunsights in the hallway. Confused by the noise, their three-year old son Zion woke up and was running up and down. Leonie said the police were “shouting at him, telling him to keep still, ‘Armed police, keep still’. How can they tell him to keep still? A three-year old?”

The police told Leonie to bring the children downstairs. “They were all still pointing their guns,” said Leonie.

“They’re telling us to come outside, but they won’t move. I had to squeeze through them.”

When Zion would not leave, the officers started shouting at him to come out. “He wouldn’t move, obviously because of the guns pointing towards him”.

Leonie eventually had to pull him from the house. Zion has been badly traumatised by the raid. He has trouble sleeping, and his toilet training has been set back dramatically.

All the family have suffered. Delroy has been nervous and unable to sleep, experiencing stress-related headaches and hair-loss. He has found this emotionally devastating. To date they have received no assistance with their requests for counselling as a family group.

The claustrophobia and the smell of the guns triggered a panic attack in Leonie, and she had to be taken to an ambulance. The children were taken to another unmarked car, separate from their parents. Before leaving the house Leonie put a blanket round 10-month old son Rio, who had just finished treatment for pneumonia. While she was in the ambulance Rio was taken out of the car without the blanket. Neighbours say he was kept out in the cold wearing just his vest, but police prevented them from coming out to wrap him up. He subsequently caught another chest infection.

Delroy describes the treatment of the children as “just unacceptable”.

Officers said they had received a tip-off there were gun parts and firearms in the house, and that the shed was full of goods stolen during the riots. They have not given any further information about this tip-off. When Leonie heard police breaking into the shed, she offered them the key. They refused.

The house was searched while Delroy and Leonie were outside. When they were allowed back in, it was in chaos and police continued searching. (See pictures at the *Kilburn Times*.)

Leonie asked about the damage. An officer said the police would fix it if they found nothing in their search, but told them they would have to lodge a complaint. Leonie assumed the police would secure the front door. They did not.

The Metropolitan Police told the BBC they had given the couple “clear guidance” on how the door would be fixed, even though they had not received a complaint. They also insisted they had advised the couple of the reasons for the raid and their rights.

Leonie and Delroy were only told about the warrant as the police were finally leaving, shortly before 4am. The

warrant mentions their right to have someone observe the search. They were not advised of this before the search began, which is another of their outstanding questions.

One officer said, “The warrant’s on the table”, told them to ring their housing association about the door, and left saying “have a good night”. Delroy asked, “How can we have a good night without a door?”

Since the raid the couple have been visited by many police officers. Delroy is dismissive of their interest. “All of a sudden everybody is our friend: that’s not acceptable. They came here, but none of them was really interested. They just wanted to cover their arses.”

He described the police as, “like a wolf in sheep’s clothing. They’re not really protecting us”.

Community Support Officers visited their neighbours to say the raid was a mistake. Delroy said the police are trying “to reassure them they won’t be treated like that, but a lot of people are scared.”

Leonie added that all the neighbours were shocked: “They said if it could happen to us it could happen to them, because we’re not that kind of people and they’re really scared.”

At Delroy’s request Chief Superintendent Matthew Gardner, Brent Police borough commander, came and gave the couple a written and verbal apology. He also submitted a complaint on their behalf, but they did not see its content. When he finally did get back to the couple, Delroy thought he did not clarify the outstanding questions.

Delroy Gardner and Leonie Reece are shocked and confused by their treatment. As Delroy put it, “I was in my place and in my time when they came in and put me down... Are we paying people just to come and kill us?”

“I don’t think if I was a billionaire they would come here like this,” he added. “The way they treat my family was like we were wild animals and we’d got away into a public area and we’re just killing and eating people.”



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