

BBC's drama on UK riots banned

Julie Hyland
20 July 2012

A court order has banned the BBC from showing a dramatised film on the riots in London and other cities last August.

The docu-drama, written by the award-winning playwright Alecky Blythe, is based on confidential interviews with 270 of those involved in the disturbances, conducted as part of the Reading the Riots study for the *Guardian* and London School of Economics.

The film was due to be shown on BBC2 at 9 p.m. on Monday. It was pulled at the 11th hour after the ruling, banning its broadcast “by any media until further order”.

A short preview clip available for viewing on the BBC web site was also pulled after the order demanded it “be removed forthwith.” A second BBC film scheduled for Wednesday based on interviews with police officers was also banned.

The implications of the court order for democratic rights are all the more sinister given that, according to the *Guardian*, “For legal reasons”, it is forbidden to “name the judge who made the ruling, the court in which he is sitting or the case he is presiding over.”

In a brief statement the BBC said only, “A court order has been made that has prevented the BBC from broadcasting the programme *The Riots: In their own Words* tonight. We will put it out at a later date.”

Across the media the ban has been met with almost total silence.

This act of state censorship and the compliance of the media is of a piece with the official response to the riots, which erupted in Tottenham, north London on August 6 and swept across the capital and to other cities in England.

Triggered by the police killing of 29-year-old father of four, Mark Duggan, two days before, the

disturbances spoke to the elemental social rage among thousands of young people against entrenched poverty, discrimination and police brutality.

From the outset, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, supported by the Labour Party, the media, minority community leaders and others categorically rejected any social causes for the disturbances. They insisted that the riots were purely the product of a criminal “underclass”.

This libel against young people was used to legitimise state repression, which saw thousands arrested and made the subject of summary justice before specially convened kangaroo courts.

To date 1,290 mainly young people have been imprisoned, often on the most minimal charges, including several who were jailed for four years because they had made Facebook postings supportive of rioting. Entire families were threatened with eviction from social housing and the loss of benefits if any member was involved in the riots.

In the aftermath of the disturbances, the government ruled out an official inquiry into its causes, establishing a “Victims Panel” in its place whose sole purpose was to recommend harsher policing and “emergency plans” to deal with “public disorder.”

In the absence of any solid information on the ban and the legal case it relates to, one can only presume that the docu-drama, in which actors repeat transcribed interviews with some of those involved in the riots, was considered to be damaging to this official presentation of events.

Reading the Riots—the only comprehensive investigation into the disturbances so far—confirmed that police brutality, poverty and social injustice were the primary motivating factors for the disturbances. Time and again, the thousands interviewed for the study—drawn from all ethnic backgrounds and, in the main, aged between 16 to 24—described Duggan’s

murder as the major trigger for their actions.

Eighty-five percent said that poverty was an “important” or “very important” factor in causing the disturbances.

“Rioters identified a range of political grievances, but at the heart of their complaints was a pervasive sense of injustice,” the report stated. “For some this was economic: the lack of money, jobs or opportunity. For others it was more broadly social: how they felt they were treated compared with others. Many mentioned the increase in student tuition fees and the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance [a benefit paid to poorer college students that was abolished by the coalition government].”

Almost one year on, no police officer has been charged with Duggan’s killing. It is now known that police claims he had opened fire, and that he was killed in self-defence, were lies. No inquiry into Duggan’s death has yet been held.

Last month north London coroner Andrew Walker angrily denounced the Independent Police Complaints Commission for refusing to hand over evidence gathered during their almost year-long inquiry. He threatened the body that it faced being in contempt of court unless the material was made available within 28 days.

The IPCC’s continued refusal to co-operate would make any inquest impossible. The Duggan family have called for it to be abolished. Mark’s aunt, Carole Duggan, complained that “65 percent of the IPCC are made up of ex-police officers. We do not trust them: they have to be abolished and replaced with an organisation made up of ordinary people.”

The Socialist Equality Party in the UK took a principled stance against the police-state measures meted out against working class youth during and after the riots. It indicted the ruling elite, its political representatives and state apparatus as the real instigators of the disturbances. For more than 30 years, they have conducted a relentless war against the gains and conditions of the working class, and the younger generation in particular—at the behest of a parasitic layer of the super-rich.

When this orgy of speculation and greed exploded in the 2008 economic crisis, billions were funnelled to the banks and wealthy, while savage austerity has been imposed against the broad mass of the population.

Against this backdrop of rising social inequality, the SEP warned that the repression employed against working class youth was symptomatic of the ruling elite’s increasing resort to anti-democratic and authoritarian measures against all working people.

One year on that warning has been graphically confirmed. The ban on the BBC drama comes under conditions in which London has been placed on virtual lock-down and transformed into a militarised zone in the advance of the Olympic Games.

Anti-aircraft missile batteries have been installed on the rooftops of housing estates, while a total of 49,000 uniformed personnel are to police the games, replete with the military hardware usually deployed in a battle zone.

The claim that this is necessary to stop terrorist attacks is absurd and is regarded as such by millions. Rather, these measures are indicative of a panic-stricken ruling elite that has lost its head. Conscious of the social and economic catastrophe it has created, and is now enforcing, it saw in the riots a foretaste of major clashes to come. What it fears, above all, is the emergence of a mass social movement that will directly challenge the capitalist profit system.

On Wednesday it was reported that professional graffiti artist Darren Cullen, who has worked for Adidas, had been arrested by British Transport Police and barred from going within a mile of any Olympic venue. He was one of four men arrested in what is described as a “pre-emptive strike” against a number of graffiti artists in advance of the games.

Arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to commit criminal damage, their ability to use public transport has been severely curtailed, and they have been banned from owning spray paint or marker pens, despite none being charged with any offence. Reportedly, Cullen’s computer, telephone and iPad were also seized.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact