

UK: Rotherham the scene of second state-organised provocation

Dave Hyland

8 November 2012

For the second time in a month, Rotherham in South Yorkshire was the scene of a state-organised political provocation on Saturday, October 27.

Two weeks after a march by 400 supporters of the anti-Islamist English Defence League was used by the police authorities to place the town on lockdown, a similar operation was carried out to protect a demonstration by just 40 members of the fascist National Front (NF), joined by an EDL splinter group, Casuals United.

Even though a total of just 50 racists were involved, they were escorted by mounted and riot police armed with short shields and batons. The cost of the huge police turnout is reported to be the same as the previous one, thereby bringing total costs of policing both demonstrations to £750,000. The true bill is nearer to £1 million once the costs of lost trade are added for the closure of shops and taxi ranks on the day of the EDL march. It will be the people of Rotherham that will be forced to pay the price even though they are already being hard hit by the recession and the austerity measures taken by successive governments.

The EDL has been using the recent convictions of Muslim men involved in the grooming of teenage white girls for prostitution to hold inflammatory demonstrations in various towns, including Rochdale in Lancashire and Walsall in the West Midlands, as well as Rotherham. They have sought to link this to the Jamia and Masjid-al-Tawhid mosque at Walthamstow, South London, which it accuses of being a power base for Islamic extremism. This anti-Islamic campaign is used to justify support for British imperialism's war drive throughout the Middle East in collaboration with US imperialism.

The dismantling of the benefits and welfare care system has led to a dramatic rise in the number of broken homes and single parent families. Teenage girls living in deteriorating social conditions, with dysfunctional family backgrounds and bad experiences of being constantly

transferred within children's homes administration, are vulnerable to the criminal and predatory gangs, white and Asian.

Under pressure from the town's traders who lost money when the shops were forced to close by the police during the earlier EDL march, shops were allowed to remain open. The NF's demo went ahead, even though they had only given the police a week's notice, insisting that this is all that's officially required for a static demonstration lasting only an hour. This demo was staged on the eve of the Muslim Eid ceremony. It was only by luck that the day didn't end in tragedy, as terrified pre-Christmas shoppers hid in doorways to avoid police horses galloping down the main pedestrian thoroughfare, chasing after local Asian youth justifiably protesting the NF presence.

While the police operation drew on forces from Derbyshire, Lancashire, Cleveland and Nottinghamshire, it was led by the infamous South Yorkshire Police—mainly responsible for the deaths, assaults and arrests of pickets during the 1984-85 miners' strike and the 1989 Sheffield Hillsborough disaster in which 96 Liverpool football supporters lost their lives after being penned-in by police.

These fascist provocations coincided with the announcement that Rotherham General Hospital was to close three of its wards with immediate effect because of the NHS Trust's financial crisis and the 90-day redundancy notices issued to the 540 miners at Maltby colliery, one of only two deep coal mines left in Yorkshire. Both of these developments will have a disastrous impact on the population of Rotherham, a town of 250,000 made up of many former pit villages.

It is because of its fear of the social unrest this might provoke that the state opened a new £7 million police training centre early last year in the Dearne Valley four miles outside Rotherham. When it opened, the *South Yorkshire Times* reported "nearly 100 training staff and over 70 Major Incident members from Barnsley,

Doncaster and Rotherham, along with a Cold Case Review team, have moved in since August.” With “the Force’s public order training base at another site in Manvers, the state-of-the-art complex now has unrivalled critical incident and public order training facilities based in the Dearne Valley”, the newspaper noted.

The ruling elite is aware that imposing this type of scorched-earth social policy on families already suffering major hardships will provoke opposition. This is the reason an expensive retraining of the police in public order operations is deemed necessary. The police are, in addition, trying to encourage wardens and unpaid volunteers to do some of the more mundane work, allowing officers to concentrate on training in the latest weapons handling and covert methods of policing, with the aid of advanced technology.

The complex has been built at a strategic location so that it will be able to strike out into any of the nearby towns—disrupting demonstrations and strikes, and carrying out spying operations and police operations such as those mounted against the EDL and NF.

Very little has been said in the national media about the size and scope of these operations.

Both the EDL and the NF have exploited the situation for publicity purposes, with photos appearing on their web sites they hope will give them certain kudos for being able to demonstrate in the heart of what was once a militant coalfield. They leave out the fact it was only made possible because of the huge police escort.

The vast majority of this solid working class community harbour a deep-seated hatred of the fascists, but this does not mean there should be any complacency. The right-wing policies of the Labour Party and the trade unions pose before the working class the danger in the rise of fascism through their ability to capitalise on social discontent and channel it in a reactionary xenophobic direction.

In the very low turnout for the 2008 Council elections in Rotherham, the British National Party (BNP) won two seats in the local villages of Brinsworth & Catcliffe and Maltby. This was largely a protest vote and within 12 months both council seats were lost. Nevertheless the dangers resulting from the Labour Party’s pro-capitalist policies are clear.

The National Front’s static demo was its first meeting anywhere in Yorkshire for several years. At one time it had been the main far-right group in the UK and is hoping to take advantage of the present crisis engulfing the BNP

to become so once again.

Dogged by revelations of links to neo-Nazi groups, the NF splintered in the 1980s. A senior NF figure, John Tyndall, founded the BNP. Nick Griffin, a Cambridge University-educated former NF national organiser and son of a leading Conservative, who has denied gas chambers were used in the Holocaust, joined the BNP in 1995. He became leader in 1999, seeking to “modernise” the party and present an electoral and more mainstream face like the “post-fascist” National Alliance in Italy.

The BNP won seats to the European Parliament in 2010 through the election of Griffin and another Holocaust denier, the fascist historian Andrew Brons. This gave them access to large amounts of money for the first time and led to divisions over whether they should concentrate on being an electoral party or not. The two MEPs have since split, with Griffin remaining at the head of the BNP and Brons about to launch a more overt fascist party, True Brits.

By holding its static demo in Rotherham, the NF was trying to take the lead in reforming the fragmented fascist movement in the UK. They were joined by a handful of supporters of Casuals United, made up of football hooligans who are calling for the unity of the fascist groups.

Meanwhile, the fake left Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party organised another “Unite against Fascism” (UAF) demonstration, sponsored by the TUC and endorsed by Labour, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, that plays the role of allowing the town’s Labour MPs and trade union bureaucrats to parade as progressives, while providing the police with a target group of Asian youth and other protesters to photograph, attack and arrest.

The UAF campaign said it was cleansing the Town Hall Square of fascists, disarming workers and youth by claiming they have “driven the Fascists out of Rotherham”. This portrayal of the fight against fascism as a form of turf war leaves the political betrayals of the Labourites unopposed and reinforces the BNP, NF and EDL’s claim to be a political alternative addressing the suffering of the “white working class”.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact