

YouTube removes “drill” music videos at request of London’s Metropolitan Police

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More than 30 “drill” music videos have been taken down by YouTube of the 50 to 60 videos the Metropolitan Police demanded be taken down over the past two years.

The rationale for deleting the videos was that they encourage violent behaviour. There is a ludicrous aspect to blaming a musical genre for the very social climate and attendant problems that it reflects. While much drill music takes a backward form, it is a product of growing social distress—reflecting a deeply troubled society, rent by poverty and social inequality, in which many young people face a dismal future.

On the basis of a few isolated cases—in which some youths allegedly associated with the drill scene have been involved in violent acts—an entire musical genre is being targeted on the spurious basis that it is responsible for what is described as a “surge” in knife crime and murders in London.

The deletion of the videos is the latest act of censorship to be carried out by Google, which owns YouTube. Its readiness to act immediately based on an appeal by the British police is confirmation of the assessment made by the WSWs that Google and the other giant tech conglomerates act as tools of state repression.

YouTube confirmed its integration with the British state, including the office of Labour Party London Mayor Sadiq Khan, with a statement reading, “We work with the Metropolitan police, the mayor’s office for policing and crime, the Home Office and community groups to understand this issue and ensure we are able to take action on gang-related content that infringe our community guidelines or break the law ... we have a dedicated process for the police to flag videos directly to our teams because we often need specialist context from law enforcement to identify real-

life threats.”

The singling out of drill accelerated in February, when a 17-year-old rapper, Junior Simpson, known as M-Trap, was sentenced to life in prison after he and three others stabbed to death 15-year-old Jermaine Goupall.

The censorship campaign was fuelled by the drive-by shooting death last month of 17-year-old Rhyhiem Barton, who was apparently a member of a drill group named Moscow17. Despite utilising Barton’s shooting in their campaign to ban drill videos, the Met have not yet made a single arrest in relation to the case.

There is no reason to accept the claims of government representatives and the corporate media that the capital is in the grip of an out of control “murder spree,” largely due to an “ultra-violent new form of music sweeping Britain,” as the *Sunday Times* has claimed.

On Wednesday, the *Financial Times* reported that according to official figures more than 60 people have been murdered in London this year. In contrast, it added, “Excluding terror attacks, there were 116 killings in the capital in the whole of 2017.” Even if killings continued at the present ratio—of around 60 in five months—the figures cited by the FT would not point to anything like a massive rise in the murder rate being claimed in a city with a population of nearly 9 million.

The attack on drill and focus on knife crime is being used to spearhead a surge in law-and-order policies in the capital and nationally.

On Wednesday, the *Times* published comments by the Met’s Trident gang unit leader, Commander Jim Stokley. It reported that the police will be given new powers and that Stokley “said that new measures would mean officers no longer needed to prove that videos and social media posts were linked to specific acts of violence to secure a conviction for incitement to

violence. He said that under the Terrorism Act the offence of inciting a person to commit an act of terrorism did not need to be linked to a particular attack.”

Stokely commented, “There isn’t specific legislation, and clearly we can’t use terrorism legislation, [but] in consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) we have found some existing legislation which we are going to use.”

The *Times* wrote, “He [Stokely] said that the force had worked closely with the CPS but cautioned that the new measures—using provisions set out in the Serious Crime Act—would be reliant on the judiciary agreeing with their reading of the law. Should this fail, the force will pursue new legislation in consultation with the Home Office.”

Stokely added that the proposed prosecutions for inciting violence “would be added to a range of other tools already being used by his officers to combat the rising tide of street violence, including stop-and-search tactics, the deployment of ‘Viper’ strike units, and recent successes in intelligence-led raids to seize guns.”

Last week, according to the *Financial Times*, the Met announced an agreement with YouTube “under which ‘trusted flaggers’ working for the force would point out to the platform especially damaging content that they thought should be taken down.”

The Met has compiled an enormous database of more than 1,400 online videos, which various newspapers state will be used as “an intelligence tool,” with the justification of tackling “violent crime.”

In April, when a copy of the Met’s “Operation Domain” database was leaked, it emerged that Scotland Yard was monitoring more than 1,100 YouTube videos, in a vast surveillance operation ostensibly seeking links to “gang crime.” with the *Times* reporting that more than “600 suspected gangsters” were being monitored.

This clampdown has been in preparation for years, with Operation Domain set up in 2015. The monitoring and censorship of social media—a vitally important strategy for the ruling elite—are the focus. An article published in the *Independent* Tuesday noted, “The government’s first-ever Serious Violence Strategy [launched in April by then Home Secretary Amber Rudd with a £40 million budget] did not name drill music specifically but said social media had created ‘an almost unlimited opportunity for rivals to antagonise

each other’ in ways viewed by a huge audience.”

Interviewed on LBC radio in May, Met Commissioner Cressida Dick asserted, “Drill music is associated with lyrics which are about glamourizing serious violence: murder, stabbings.”

“For us, if it’s against the law, it’s against the law and it ought to be taken down.”

If anyone knows all about “serious violence,” it is Dick. In July 2005, she was the “Gold Commander” in charge of the “shoot-to-kill” operation that saw Jean Charles de Menezes, a young Brazilian electrician, trailed from his flat by anti-terror officers, pinned down in a London underground train and, without warning, shot seven times in the head at point-blank range.

As with all censorship by the state, the drive against drill sets a disturbing precedent. What is going to be banned next on the basis that it represents “especially damaging content”?

The incessant media propaganda that drill music is solely based around the promotion of violence and gang warfare is a lie. The song “Grenfell Tower’s Burnin” by one drill artist, El Nino, was described in its press release as a “furious response” by eyewitnesses to last year’s inferno in London that claimed at least 72 lives.

In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, El Nino said, “The song’s not just about Grenfell Tower. It’s about what’s going on in the world. The rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer.”

Another drill artist, MC Abra Cadabra, said earlier this year, as the campaign to demonise drill was being ratcheted up, “Targeting musicians is a distraction. The cuts that affect schools, youth clubs, social housing, benefits, are making life harder for the average person living on or below the poverty line in this city. There are people doing mad things, not because they want to, but because the situation has forced them to.”



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