

UK: Police take no action over far-right attack on Bookmarks bookstore

Paul Mitchell
15 August 2018

Last Saturday, August 11, in central London, a small group of far-right thugs returned to the Bookmarks bookstore, intent on entering and disrupting a meeting held to protest the attack on the store by members of “Make Britain Great Again” (MBGA) just one week earlier.

Several hundred people turned up to show their support for Bookmarks, which is run by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and is the official bookseller of the Trades Union Congress. They listened to authors, poets and other speakers in the shop and at an overflow meeting in nearby Bloomsbury Baptist Church.

Bookmarks manager Dave Gilchrist told the crowd, “The number of messages we’ve received has been absolutely immense.

“You recognise that what happened, an attack on a bookshop, was not merely an attack on us but a whole movement—the Labour, the trade union movement, the radical movement and the left entirely.

“Whatever the intentions were of these fascists breaking into our shop, destroying books, harassing staff, the opposite has been the case because in fact we’ve emerged from this much, much stronger,” he added.

David Rosenberg, author of *Battle for the East End*, read out a statement from Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn that said, “Bookshops being attacked shows how frightened they are of ideas of a different world of social justice and equality. ... There is only one eternal answer: solidarity.”

However, despite the large crowd, the sensitive nature of the event and the high probability of a far-right provocation, there was no police presence.

It was left to a couple of stewards and some of those milling around outside the meeting to prevent the handful of thugs gaining entry to the event and to then

chase them off.

The police response to calls for help was to send one officer (and a junior in support) who proceeded to tell a steward to phone again if there was further trouble. He made no attempt to summon support to apprehend the suspects, whose yells could still be heard in the background.

This follows a pattern.

The Metropolitan Police Service has repeatedly treated such aggressive displays by fascists in central London over the last weeks with kid gloves, including a rally on the day of one of the main events of the Royal Family calendar, Trooping the Colour, with the Royal Family gathered on the balcony of Buckingham Palace just hours before.

Despite London being the CCTV capital of the world and the perpetrators gleefully posting videos of their activities on social media, there have been no reports to date of their detention, arrest or charging.

When Steve Hedley, assistant general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, was subjected to a bloody assault last month—following his speech at a Stand Up To Racism counter-protest of a far-right demonstration in support of Tommy Robinson—it was he and his companions who were arrested and detained for several hours. The real culprits were able to vanish into thin air despite a massive police presence on the day.

The same held true on August 4 at Bookmarks, when it was invaded by a dozen far-right, anti-Muslim and pro-Trump MBGA supporters who intimidated staff and customers, tore up posters and overturned displays.

The action was organised by the People’s Charter Foundation/MBGA, whose patrons include Robert Oulds, chair of the right-wing, anti-European Union Bruges Group, and Elizabeth Jones, a member of the

National Executive Committee of the United Kingdom Independence party (UKIP).

UKIP, for damage limitation purposes, was forced to suspend Jones along with the protest organisers, her brother Luke Nash-Jones and Martin Costello, only to later reinstate Jones, who was not present at the provocation.

Even so, there are no reports of the police questioning any of the three, or any one of those taking part who are clearly identifiable from the 12 and a half minutes of film footage they made and which has been posted on YouTube. One of the participants declares, “We’re going to do an ambush. ... Let’s get the bastards.” Luke Nash-Jones is seen clearly organising the group, fraternising with an individual in a Trump mask and telling them to wait for three minutes until he has entered Bookmarks acting “normally” and put on his red MBGA hat. The group then pour in chanting “Tommy Robinson,” “F***ing paedophile nutters,” “Scum,” and “Trump, Trump, Trump,” intimidating the staff and customers, tearing up posters and knocking over displays.

That Nash-Jones is concerned about prosecution over the storming of Bookmarks is evident in a subsequent video published on the Red Pill Factory website. He is obviously afraid, blatantly lies about what happened and attempts to shift the blame onto the Trump character for initiating a “prank” that went wrong. Nash-Jones declares that MBGA opposed the criminal damage inflicted on the bookshop by “third parties” and that all he wanted was a “political debate” with the Bookmarks staff “in the spirit of John Stuart Mill.” An earlier posting of a video, now taken down, makes clear that Nash-Jones knows the identity of the man in the Trump mask and the individual filming events who tore up placards.

Despite Nash-Jones’s admission that criminal damage took place and the obvious public order offence, which covers “affray...using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour causing fear of or provoking violence,” the Metropolitan Police downplayed the incident. They merely recorded, “Police were called at approximately 18:35hrs on Saturday, 4 August to reports of a protest inside a shop on Bloomsbury Street, WC1.

“No other offences were disclosed at the time. Police received a second call a short time later stating that the

group had left the premises after causing some damage inside the shop. There were no injuries. An appointment has been made for officers to speak with the complainant. No arrests have been made.”

The Bookmarks attacks are part of a resurgence of far-right, often violent, activity in Britain and internationally. These are minuscule groups with little or no public support, but they are being orchestrated and financially backed by extremely wealthy and influential figures in the US and British elite and act under the protection of the state.

They have been encouraged by the Brexit referendum result, media coverage of US President Donald Trump and the Tommy Robinson campaign.

Robinson was jailed on May 25 for contempt of court after live-streaming a fascistic rant against “Muslim paedophiles” and “Muslim rapists” during the concluding stage of a child-grooming trial in Leeds. His promotion as a “free speech” martyr is a calculated attempt by sections of the political elite to cultivate a far-right movement along the lines of Germany’s Alternative for Germany (AfD) and France’s Rassemblement National (the renamed National Front.)

A key player has been former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs banker and self-professed admirer of Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Bannon has echoed Trump’s barely disguised call for Boris Johnson to replace Theresa May as prime minister.

What is also revealed by the attack on Bookmarks and Steve Hedley is that fascistic layers feel able to attack the left because they enjoy virtual impunity from prosecution by the police.



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