

The fascist attack on Guardian journalist Owen Jones

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The brutal assault on *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones must be taken as a grave warning of the dangers to the working class from the far right.

At around 3.00 am on Saturday morning, Jones left a pub in Islington, London, with six friends, when four men “charged directly towards me: one of them karate kicked my back, threw me to the ground, started kicking me in the head and back, while my friends tried to drag them off, and were punched trying to defend me.”

Jones stressed that he was singled out for a “politically motivated premeditated attack.” He has been repeatedly targeted by far-right activists, including previous physical assaults, and has said that he has evidence “which suggests political motivations.”

Jones suffered relatively minor injuries, but the assault could easily have been fatal given that he was kicked in the head. Yet despite the availability of CCTV footage and the names of those who have threatened him in the past being known, no arrests have been made. The Metropolitan Police instead issued a statement that they were examining whether this “senseless attack” was indeed a hate crime. The media has already relegated the story to its inside pages.

Jones is only the latest prominent left-wing figure to suffer a premeditated physical assault in the UK. In June 2016, the fascist Thomas Mair murdered Labour MP Jo Cox, shooting and stabbing her as he shouted, “Britain first!” Cox was a prominent campaigner for a Remain vote during the ongoing Brexit referendum.

In July 2018, Steve Hedley, assistant general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, and his partner were savagely assaulted in a pub by fascists following a Stand Up to Racism demonstration in London. Again, no arrests were made.

During the 2018 trial of Darren Osborne, who killed a

Muslim worshipper and injured 12 others when he drove a hired van into a crowd outside Finsbury Park Mosque in 2017, he admitted planning to murder Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Labour’s London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

In March, Corbyn was punched in the head by a far-right thug and Brexit supporter, John Murphy, at the Finsbury Park Mosque’s Muslim Welfare House. No police officers were present to defend Corbyn. Murphy was later only given a 28-day sentence for “common assault.”

In April, neo-Nazi member of National Action Jack Renshaw was convicted for plotting to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper with a replica 19-inch Roman Gladius sword in 2017.

There have been politically inspired attacks on less prominent victims. In October 2018, Jade Unal, was attacked after leaving a Labour Party meeting on Brexit, suffering from concussion for five days. Her attackers said they knew where she lived, forcing Unal and her daughter to go into hiding. No arrests were made.

The cowardly nature of the assault on Jones confirms that the threat posed by the fascists is not due to their having mass support. The groups involved number in the tens and hundreds. What the fascists have in their favour is that they are backed to the hilt and protected by the ruling class and its state apparatus and lent ideological support by the major parties and the media.

Jones identified the media and political establishment as culpable in “the rise of an emboldened far right, which is increasingly violent, and targeting minorities and people on the left.” He cited headlines depicting political opponents of Brexit as “traitors” as an example of the way the media encourages the nationalist right.

Pro-Brexit rhetoric has been a significant factor in the whipping up of fascistic violence in the UK, including the attacks on Cox, Unal and Corbyn. But the ever-steeper descent of capitalism into crisis is inevitably accompanied by the whipping up of nationalist reaction in all countries and by all factions of the ruling class.

The coming to power of far-right governments—in the United States, Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary and Italy is always accompanied by a turn to fascist terror. New Zealand’s Christchurch mosque killer, Brenton Tarrant, cited Finsbury Park mosque attacker Darren Osborne as an inspiration for his murder of 51 Muslims, as well as the Norwegian far-right mass murderer Anders Breivik who in 2011, killed eight people with a bomb in Oslo, before shooting dead 69 participants of a social democratic Workers Youth League summer camp.

In Germany, Christian Democratic politician Walter Lübcke was killed June 2 by a known neo-Nazi after speaking out in defence of refugees. In October 2015 Henriette Reker, now mayor of Cologne, was stabbed with a knife during an election campaign. Since 1990 at least 169 people have been murdered by right-wingers. According to official figures, there have been 8,600 right-wing criminal offences in the first six months of this year, including 363 acts of violence injuring 179 people. Police have identified 2,625 suspects, but only 23 were arrested.

In the United States, *ABC News* and *Mother Jones* have both identified the close link between mass shootings and other violent acts and the racist rhetoric of Donald Trump. *ABC News* lists at least 36 criminal cases where Trump’s name was invoked in direct connection with violent acts, threats of violence or allegations of assault. According to *Mother Jones*, there have been at least six mass shootings since last October motivated by far-right ideology resulting in 41 deaths and at least 52 wounded. Trump supporters have violently threatened Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, threatening to “put a bullet” in her skull.

The efforts by the ruling elite to cultivate the far right has objective roots. The gap between a fabulously wealthy elite and the great mass of the population struggling to survive has never been wider. Class tensions internationally have reached a breaking point. Fearing the emergence of social and political

opposition, the ruling class everywhere responds by turning ever more sharply to authoritarian forms of rule and by cultivating far-right forces as a weapon against the working class.

It is no accident that the fascist attack on one of the UK’s most prominent “left” journalists took place just half an hour’s drive from Belmarsh maximum security prison, where Wikileaks founder Julian Assange is incarcerated. The treatment meted out to Assange is more brutal than even the beating suffered by Jones. Subjected to psychological torture and the terrible physical impact of prolonged isolation, Assange’s life is already in danger. If he lives, then he will be sent to the US to face life imprisonment or the death penalty for the sole “crime” of practising journalism that exposed imperialist war crimes.

Popular hostility to the far right is overwhelming, but presently finds no effective political expression. For this a new axis of struggle is required.

The coming to power of Hitler in the 1930s demonstrates that fascism cannot be opposed by appeals to the supposedly “democratic” representatives of capitalism. Hitler was handed control of the state with the backing of the heads of the army, big business and the main bourgeois parties. Under conditions of a raging economic crisis, he was tasked with the brutal subjugation of the working class.

Today, for the same reason, the far right enjoys the protection of the state. But this conspiracy can and will be defeated providing that the working class is politically mobilised in defence of its independent interests. This means linking opposition to fascist violence and to the vicious campaign against immigrants and the refugees from imperialism’s wars of colonial plunder to the struggle in defence of jobs and essential services and for socialism. The objective basis for such a movement is already emerging in an international wave of strikes and social protest in defence of democratic rights.



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