

UK: Thousands visit mural of footballer Marcus Rashford to protest its defacing by racists

Our reporter
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The WSWS spoke yesterday to some of those who visited the mural of footballer Marcus Rashford in the Withington district of south Manchester.

They had gathered there to protest against racism, after the mural was daubed with racist graffiti within an hour of England's Sunday evening defeat by Italy in the European Championship final.

Rashford, along with two other black England players, missed a penalty in the decisive shootout at the end of match. All were targeted for online racist abuse.

On Tuesday morning, Akse, the artist who painted the mural, spray painted over the graffiti, restoring it. Before he arrived, a local resident had covered the racist messages up with bin liners. Many then covered much of the wall with anti-racist messages, showing their appreciation for Rashford and the other footballers.

Rashford launched a campaign during the pandemic last year that forced the government to provide the poorest schoolchildren with free school meals during school holidays. Many of the messages on the mural, including from schoolchildren, refer to Rashford's campaign and how it prevented children going hungry. One message read, "As a kid I felt hungry most of the time... I would often chew on used bubble gum picked off the floor outside. You have given me and so many other people much comfort for the battles you have fought for our young". Another read, "Thank you for being a great role model and helping children, schools and the homeless/poor." A love heart with the words "Saved our Children!" included a photo of Rashford and his mother helping out at a foodbank.

A poem read in part, "It's not just winning that makes us winners, there's more important stuff like

making sure kids get dinners." Another message read simply, "A working class hero is something to be".

Holly said, "I'm a student and I've come down here to show some support. I am so proud to live in a community like this who do value school meals and things over a penalty."

Asked her thoughts about Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel posing as opponents of racism, she replied, "It's absolutely outrageous what the government have said and the pure hypocrisy of the fact that beforehand Johnson was saying take the politics out of football, taking the knee is 'gesture politics', all of that. They're all at it and then expect everyone to believe them when they come back afterwards and say 'Oh no, this racism is bad, we don't like this!'. What do they expect? They lit the fire of racism by not calling it out at the start.

"I don't think that people value a missed penalty over his work with school dinners and child hunger. People value what he's done for the community. I think he is incredible."

Sophia, a student, said there was a "backlash to the comments that were put out on this". "It's nice to see that there are more loving people out there than people throwing out hate. Seeing Marcus Rashford's comments on them too, I find it quite emotional. He knows this is happening and that there is support out there and that we are all behind him.

"As well as people in the local community being here, I just heard there were people from Germany who have come down to have a look and see what's been put on the wall. It really puts the racists out there down. It's a shame that you do need someone to throw out a hate comment for this unity to come up, but the love

and support is out there.”

Sophia said of Rashford’s campaigning, “I think it’s incredible that he has managed to do that alongside an incredible career at both Manchester United and with England. I don’t know anyone else that could have balanced their time so well and play incredible football at the same time. It’s so impressive.”

Lou, a worker who was at the mural with his daughter, said, “As soon as it happened, we were disgusted, the wider majority of Manchester were. Whoever has done this, the minority, are just brain dead-idiots. This does not represent us, the majority here in Manchester.”

“This what you see here, us coming together now, this reaction this outpouring of love and affection for a local legend, that’s the people of Manchester. This is what we represent, it’s what he represents. He feeds the kids for god’s sake! So what if he missed a penalty? Who cares? Football is not life or death. We’re all England fans but it’s irrelevant. Racism cannot be stood for anymore. I’ve had enough of it.”

Speaking about the poverty Rashford has highlighted and fought against, Lou said, “It shouldn’t be happening in today’s society. I just thought this is an opportunity to teach my daughter a lesson, and I am going to show her these pictures in 10 years’ time. I will say ‘we got to a final, it was fantastic, then something bad happened, but then something immediately good happened as a reaction.’ I want to bring my daughter up with the right values, standards and morals and I want her to know the difference between what’s right and what’s wrong.

“The government are disgusting. Patel condemned the footballers who have been taking the knee. She was saying it was gesture politics and now she wants to jump on the bandwagon. We don’t pay any attention to Priti Patel, her words are hollow and empty, they mean nothing to us. She is not the kind of person that we look up to in this city. Marcus is the kind of person that we look up to in this city.”

Tom, a young worker said, “Rashford is not just a good footballer... he’s someone to look up to. There are a lot of people that have come down here today, that look up to him because he’s a brilliant person on and off the pitch. Look at what he has done for the kids, for the community. He’s given back... so when he gets all of the hate and abuse, we have to come together and

stand up for him, stand behind him. He’s just a regular lad, a commoner done good.”

Young people George and Rosy attended. George said, “It’s such an outpouring of support, I hope he [Rashford] sees it.” Rosy added, “It’s such a good retaliation to the racist comments, so that he knows it’s not just those few people’s voices to hear. But there is everyone else’s voice here and the admiration for him too.”

Tru Powell travelled from Birmingham to Manchester to show his support for the players. He said, “I thought it was really important that my boys see representation and that the boys see not all people are racists. There has been a small minority who have been quite visceral in their treatment to not just Marcus, but the other black players. They’ve heard and seen a few things and I thought, actually, let me show them what the world actually is and not everybody thinks like that. We’ve come all the way from Birmingham just to show that some things are really important.”

Tru said of Priti Patel, “You’ve literally lit the fire and watched it burn, and now it’s burning you want to come in and condemn it? Too little, too late. Rashford has been inspirational, and I think he has been a hero. And even when the leader of the country wanted the kids to starve, it wasn’t happening on Marcus’ watch. He made a commitment to feed the kids.

“I think it’s things like that which resonate with me, and even after all that he is still subject to visceral abuse, even after playing his heart out for his team.... Ok, he missed a penalty, but why can’t that be down to human error? Why does that have to be because he’s black? He put his reputation on the line, everything on the line, to support a cause that he was really passionate about. I think this is why he has resonated with so many people.”



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