

Hundreds take to the streets to oppose police immigration raid in Hackney, London

Robert Stevens
16 May 2022

Hundreds of people resisted violent attempts by London's Metropolitan Police to carry out an anti-immigration raid in the east London borough of Hackney Saturday evening.

Tensions had already flared as police massed in the area during the day and questioned delivery drivers over the status of their insurance and licenses.

The violence began when police raided a property in Ashwin Street in the Dalton area of the borough, located off the main Kingsland Road. As police attempted to arrest a driver for "immigration offences" a group of local people moved in to stop them taking him away.

Calls were put out on social media for people to come to the scene to oppose the police operation. Alex Marshall, president of the small Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, who was employed for eight years as a courier in London, wrote in a post retweeted over 1,200 times and liked over 2,100 times, "IMMIGRATION RAID HAPPENING NOW IN HACKNEY KINGSLAND RD/ASHWIN ST JUNCTION. 3 people have been detained and crowds gathering to resist. If you are nearby please get down. We need people! SHARE SHARE SHARE".

Many answered this and other calls. Very soon hundreds of people were on Kingsland Road, outside the main Kingsland Shopping Centre, with the crowd spread down to Dalston Kingsland London Underground station. People chanted "let them go" in reference to those being arrested and denounced police as "scum."

According to one eyewitness, Claire, the intervention by the local population prevented at least two of the drivers from being taken. The *London Economic* news site reported that "a third detainee was eventually let go 'as a result of the public protest'."

The police were eventually forced to leave the area, with officers chased away from the Kingsland High Street on foot and in their cars and vans.

The *Daily Telegraph* reported Saturday evening that nine people were arrested "for offences including violent disorder. They remain in custody."

Video footage and photos of the events, widely shared and viewed by hundreds of thousands on social media, show police brutally attacking protesters including by punching and shoving them. One shows a man being punched in the head five times by an officer while he is lying face-down on the street, held there by other police. He is then dragged along the road, with his t-shirt almost ripped off.

The brutal scene was uploaded to Twitter by Charlotte Middlehurst, a journalist in London and assistant UK news editor at the *Financial Times*. Middlehurst posted footage, shot by an Instagram user, with the comment, "How do the @metpoliceuk justify this awful violence?"

Another video shows a young man repeatedly thrown to the ground. When he tries to escape he is grabbed by an officer and slung violently, three times, to the ground.

One of those who witnessed the violence meted out by police was Green Party Dalston Ward Councillor Zoë Garbett. In a statement she said, "I condemn the action taken by the police," which she described as "disproportionate and inflammatory".

She explained, "about 20 police officers" initially turned up. "One rider was asked about their immigration status and reportedly arrested. Activists were already on scene and attempted to prevent this. The situation escalated quickly with, at its height, about 100 police in attendance with multiple clashes between the protesters and the police."

She added, “The police were pursuing and arresting people. I witnessed the police forcefully pushing people and throwing them to the ground or out the way and using batons to hit people. It felt incredibly unsafe and threatening particularly with the police charging into the crowd and at individuals. There was a lot of disruption and distress caused for residents living, shopping and working in the area.

“I did not see and there did not appear to be any attempts by the police to de-escalate the situation.”

With the brutality of their officers recorded and then shared by thousands, the Met went into damage limitation mode. They posted a statement at 10 p.m. Saturday alongside the comment, “We are aware of a number of videos on social media showing disorder in Dalston earlier this evening. We would urge people to remember that such videos rarely provide a full and accurate picture of what is taking place.”

The Met said in the vaguest terms that in the course of its operation targeting “e-scooters and moped crimes in Dalston”, this led to “police detaining a man who showed up on the system as someone who had committed an immigration offence.”

The Met acknowledged the sizable crowd which showed up to oppose them, stating, “In a very short time the crowd grew significantly in size. We are aware of efforts on social media to summon people to the area specifically to obstruct officers, suggesting the incident was an ‘immigration raid’”

The statement made no mention of the police violence against protesters. Instead, it blamed the protesters, claiming without evidence that “A number of officers were assaulted. Fortunately, they did not require hospital treatment.” Following widespread anger in the local area and on social media, the Met said that “any footage showing the use of force” was being “reviewed” by the Directorate of Professional Standards.

Police raids in working-class areas, including brutal immigration raids, have been normalised over the last decade with the Conservative government rolling out its “hostile environment” for immigrants and asylum seekers. Hackney has been the scene of several such operations. In February, eight delivery drivers were arrested and subjected to fines following a raid.

The mobilisation to prevent the police operation in London is a significant political response to the

continual scapegoating of immigrants and asylum seekers by the ruling elite and its parties.

Last year a similar protest took place in Glasgow where hundreds of people flooded into Kenmure Street in the Pollokshields area to prevent immigration officers removing two men, Sumit Sehdev and Lakhvir Singh, from their top-floor flat. Swelling in numbers, the demonstration blocked the police vehicle from leaving for several hours. One neighbour lay underneath the van to stop it departing. Local residents even established a snack centre for protesters in a bus shelter, with nearby families providing food and drink.

The mass mobilisation of such progressive, anti-authoritarian sentiment is a political necessity as the Conservative government, with the backing of the Labour Party, escalates its onslaught against immigrants and asylum seekers.

The Hackney raid took place on the same day the *Daily Mail* reported that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had told them in an interview that “the first 50 ‘illegal entrants into this country’ have already been served notice that they will be sent to Rwanda within a fortnight.”

Johnson warned that the government will stop at nothing, including fighting legal challenges, to enforce its xenophobic agenda. He said, “There’s going to be a lot of legal opposition from the types of firms that for a long time have been taking taxpayers’ money to mount these sorts of cases, and to thwart the will of the people, the will of Parliament. We’re ready for that.

“We will dig in for the fight and you know, we will make it work. We’ve got a huge flowchart of things we have to do to deal with it, with the Leftie lawyers.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact