

# Major police clampdown as riots spread across London and other UK cities

Julie Hyland  
9 August 2011

A massive police presence has been established across parts of the capital in an attempt to crush the eruption of social anger that has affected areas of north and southeast London and is spreading to other UK cities.

Rioting in Tottenham on Saturday evening was triggered by the fatal police shooting early Thursday evening of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old father of four, by Specialist Firearms officers.

On Sunday, disturbances broke out in Brixton, Enfield, Walthamstow, Islington and Oxford Street, central London. By Monday afternoon, riots were also under way in Hackney in east London and Lewisham and Peckham in southeast London. Disturbances also broke out in Birmingham, England's second city.

Upwards of 220 were arrested in less than 48 hours.

The scale of the police response belies claims that they were "taken by surprise" by events. Not only were the notorious Territorial Support Group (TSG)—the capital's specialist public order police unit—on standby as "contingency" during peaceful protests against Duggan's killing immediately prior to Saturday's riots. By Sunday afternoon, thousands of police reinforcements had been drafted into Tottenham and other parts of north London from Thames Valley, Kent, Surrey, Essex and the City of London.

It is reported, for example, that by 9:30 pm that day the "whole of Enfield"—just a short distance from Tottenham—had been turned into a "sterile area" by the Metropolitan Police and back-up forces from Kent.

"Hundreds of riot police arrived with vans and police dogs, charging at groups of teenagers who disappeared into side streets, smashing cars and shop windows as they ran," the *Guardian* reported. Police on horseback charged any groups of youth in the area, while police helicopters were deployed overhead.

Riots in Hackney were reportedly triggered by a police stop and search of a young man sitting outside a MacDonald's restaurant late Monday afternoon. When he protested that he had done nothing wrong and refused to be searched, a riot van drew up and police attempted to arrest him. A crowd gathered in his defence and the situation quickly escalated into running confrontations between large numbers of riot police and hundreds of young people.

The police clampdown is being put in place even as the official version of events leading up to the rioting in Tottenham is unraveling.

Police had claimed that Duggan, a passenger in a taxi cab, opened fire on officers as they attempted to stop the vehicle as part of a pre-planned arrest operation. One officer only narrowly escaped death, according to police statements, when the bullet fired by Duggan hit his radio. Other officers returned fire in self-defence and Duggan died instantly. A non-police issue firearm was said to have been recovered from the scene.

On Saturday afternoon, upwards of 200 people gathered at Tottenham police station to demand "justice for Mark Duggan." The protesters, including Duggan's fiancé Semone Wilson, complained that they had been given no explanation for the shooting. Police say that after several hours, what they acknowledge had been a peaceful protest suddenly turned violent when gangs of youth began attacking police cars.

But according to the *Guardian*, yet to be released ballistic tests show that it was a police-issued bullet that was found in the police radio. This would indicate that the police did execute Duggan, as many suspected. Eyewitnesses said they saw police shoot Duggan as he lay face down on the floor.

As for police claims about the protest, video footage has now emerged of police brutally beating a young

girl, causing outrage from the crowd.

The video posted on YouTube confirms eyewitness accounts that the rioting was triggered when police “set upon” the 16-year-old. One local resident, Laurence Bailey, told reporters he saw “15 riot officers pounding her with shields.”

“She went down on the floor, but once she managed to get up she was hit again before being half-dragged away by her friend,” he said.

When the incensed crowd surged forward, police cars were used to block the road. These were the cars that were attacked by youth and set on fire.

As evidence mounts of a police provocation, a concerted campaign is underway by the media and the major political parties to blame the disturbances on “copy-cat criminals” and “looters” with the aim of justifying further state repression.

A spokesman for Conservative Party Prime Minister David Cameron condemned the rioting as “utterly unacceptable,” while Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrat Party described it as “opportunistic theft.”

Kit Malthouse, the Conservative Party chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, said: “Obviously there are people in this city, sadly, who are intent on violence, who are looking for the opportunity to steal and set fire to buildings and create a sense of mayhem, whether they’re anarchists or part of organised gangs or just feral youth, frankly, who fancy a new pair of trainers.”

The Labour Party’s shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, demanded “robust leadership and action in London now to prevent this disorder and criminality” from spreading.

“We need to be assured that the police have the resources necessary to maintain public order but also to conduct targeted follow-up operations to bring criminals to justice,” she continued, adding, “We also need a clear strategy from the government and the mayor to prevent this disorder becoming a repeated problem throughout August and September.”

Cooper’s remarks are a veiled reference to the austerity measures that have been implemented by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, involving spending cuts of some £80 billion that will devastate jobs, living standards and social programs. In recent months the government has tripled the cost of

university tuition and abolished the Education Maintenance Allowance, paid to some 640,000 16-18 year olds to help them continue in higher education.

Areas like Tottenham, amongst the most deprived in the country, have been particularly hard hit. Unemployment officially stands at 8.8 percent, but will be much higher amongst young people. Claims for Jobseeker’s Allowance have risen by 10 percent in the last year, while Haringey Council has cut £41 million from its budget, reducing its youth services by 75 percent.

This is the social reality that underlies the London disturbances. It is replicated in working class areas across the country. It is the reason Cooper anticipates “repeated” disorder in the coming months.

The political establishment, the police and the media are seeking to utilize these events to justify even more draconian measures. The *Daily Express* editorialised Monday: “Society is paying the price of wasting too many years on trying to ‘understand’ young men with chips on their shoulders and not handing out the harsh punishment that criminals so richly deserve.”

On Monday afternoon, Home Secretary Theresa May met with police to coordinate what was described as a “robust” response to the riots.

The YouTube footage can be viewed here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**