

16,000 police deployed in London to put down youth revolt

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10 August 2011

Prime Minister David Cameron chaired a meeting of the governmental emergency COBRA committee yesterday and called a special sitting in parliament for Thursday, in response to continuing rioting in London that has spread to other towns and cities in England.

Cameron was forced to cut short his holiday in Tuscany to oversee plans for a major police operation across the capital. Some 16,000 police were on duty last night—treble the usual number—with back-up being brought in from across the country.

The measures came in response to rioting that had spread across London as well as Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Nottingham. On Tuesday evening reports emerged of additional disturbances in Manchester, adjacent Salford and West Bromwich and Wolverhampton in the Midlands.

The riots were triggered by the police killing of 29-year-old Tottenham resident Mark Duggan by an officer of the Specialist Firearm Command (CO19) last Thursday evening. A peaceful protest of Duggan's family and supporters on Saturday evening was brutally attacked by riot police, sparking a wave of unrest.

Late Monday, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), acknowledged that Duggan had not opened fire on police, as had originally been claimed. It said ballistic tests presented “no evidence” that a handgun, found at the scene where Duggan was killed, had been fired at officers.

The IPCC found that a CO19 firearms officer fired two bullets, one of which lodged in a police radio after possibly passing through Duggan's body. Duggan had also been hit in the arm.

The statement confirms accounts that Duggan was the victim of police, who acted as judge, jury and

executioner. Yet no one has been held to account for his killing. The officer involved has simply been removed from duty. The inquest into Duggan's death was adjourned on Tuesday pending an IPCC investigation that could take six months.

Moreover, long-simmering discontent over worsening social conditions and police brutality is being completely passed over by the official political parties and the media. Manifestly, police killings are acceptable to these layers, but any response to it is to be met with the full force of the state.

The most vicious rhetoric has been employed against young people involved in the disturbances by representatives of all the main political parties.

Cameron announced that the government would do “everything necessary to restore order to Britain's streets”. Describing the events as “criminality, pure and simple”, he said those arrested, “will feel the full force of the law. If you are old enough to commit these crimes, you are old enough to face the punishment”.

As the entire political establishment—including Cameron and the Metropolitan Police—is implicated in the criminal *News of the World* hacking scandal involving arch-reactionary, multi-billionaire media owner Rupert Murdoch, such comments are staggeringly hypocritical.

The Labour Party, for its part, is trying to outflank Cameron on “law and order”. Labour leader Ed Miliband demanded a “robust” response by the police: “there needs to be a police presence in all parts of London”.

Labour MP Tom Watson—who only recently politely quizzed Murdoch and his son, James, at a parliamentary select committee over their involvement in illegal activities, including the bribery of Metropolitan Police officers—called for the use of the army. On Twitter he

demanded, “No brainer: Recall parliament. Cancel all police leave. Bring in army logistical support for emergency workers. Stop police cuts.”

Former Labour London Mayor Ken Livingstone, while acknowledging the “social divisions” created by the government’s £80 billion mass austerity measures, called for the use of water cannon. Labour MP for Hackney Dianne Abbott said a curfew had to be considered.

Conservative MP Patrick Mercer called for the government to deploy the type of brutal state repression used by British imperialism in Northern Ireland on the streets of London. “I find it strange that we are willing to use these sorts of measures against the Irish”, he said, “yet when Englishmen step out of line and behave in this atrocious and appalling way, we are happy to mollycoddle them.”

Mercer said troops should not be used at this point: “This is not a military situation, you bring troops in and it starts suggesting a revolution—we are nowhere near that.”

His comments, invoking the spectre of “revolution”, reflect the ruling elite’s fear of the implications of a whole generation of youth, with no secure future, expressing their social discontent and hatred for the political establishment. The social conditions underlying the riots are an indictment of the capitalist system and the British political establishment, which offers no future for broad masses of people.

Even before the general election last year, Liberal Democrat leader, now deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg warned of “serious social strife” in response to the global economic crisis and the imposition of savage spending cuts by a “government that has no legitimacy”. Now Clegg and the Liberal Democrats are part of such a government, imposing massive austerity cuts and demanding authoritarian measures to implement them.

To date, the government has ruled out the use of the army. However, the use of plastic baton rounds is being “actively considered”, while the use of heavily armoured police vehicles is to be extended. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Steve Kavanagh of the Metropolitan Police said plastic bullets had been available for riot police to use for the last three days, adding: “If we need to [use them], we will do so”.

Discussions on the use of the army is indicative of the

draconian response of the ruling establishment to the social discontent that has exploded in London and now elsewhere.

The policing operation in the capital is the largest in British history. The leave of all Metropolitan Police officers has been suspended, and riot police have been sent to the capital from 30 other forces around the country, including Manchester, more than 150 miles away. Retired Met Police officers have also been asked to assist.

At the same time, some 600 people have been arrested since Saturday evening in police sweeps, the vast majority in the capital. London’s police cells are now full, and those rounded-up are now being “bussed” out to neighbouring areas. Some 500 detectives are also involved in studying CCTV footage and images of the disturbances, in the largest criminal investigation in the history of the Met.

The 100 or so charged thus far include youth, workers and unemployed university graduates—refuting the hysterical claims of the media and political establishment that those involved are simply a “criminal underclass” bent on destruction.

Other arrests include that of 16-year-old boy in Glasgow, for allegedly inciting riots in the city using Facebook, and a man arrested by Greater Manchester Police on “suspicion” of using social media to incite disorder.



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