

UK Labour denounces “audacious criminality” of Leeds riots

Our reporters
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Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper ordered a law-and-order crackdown by West Yorkshire Police against a riot in Leeds, England provoked by the violent seizure of four Romanian children from their family last Thursday night.

Police forcibly removed the children, aged between 7 and 14 years, from their sister’s home in Harehills on safeguarding grounds, handcuffing one of the children and dragging them from the property into a marked police van.

A video of the incident shared on TikTok exposes police gestapo tactics against minors. Distressed relatives, friends and neighbours can be seen protesting the police brutality.

Riots ensued, with youth attacking police vehicles and setting fire to bins, wooden pallets and a bus. The situation was inflamed by the arrival of police in riot gear who later retreated as local elders appealed for calm.

The incident has exposed the brutal state of class relations in Britain, with a newly elected Labour government responding to acute social problems produced by decades of austerity with police methods and the criminalisation of the poor.

Rather than express any sympathy for the family, Labour politicians immediately used the event to further their law-and-order agenda. Cooper tweeted at 10:41pm: “I am appalled at the shocking scenes and attacks on police vehicles and public transport in Leeds. Disorder of this nature has no place in our society.”

Those responsible for the night’s “audacious criminality” should feel the “full force of the law”, she later declared.

Starmer’s spokesperson called on West Yorkshire Police to take “the strongest possible action” against perpetrators, adding “disorder of this nature has no place in our society.”

Starmer also echoed calls by West Yorkshire Police to stop “speculating on the cause of the disorder”. But he refused to publicly name those responsible for spreading far-right disinformation and fake news aimed at inciting race hatred.

Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, attending the Republican National Convention in Wisconsin, sought to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment, posting on X: “The politics of the subcontinent are currently playing out on the streets of Leeds. Don’t say I didn’t warn you”. Farage’s intervention, like that of Tommy Robinson and other fascist dregs, was given

sustenance by labour’s law-and-order response.

Family challenges media lies

On Saturday, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) spoke with family members.

Florin, the uncle of the children seized by police, spoke on behalf of Maricel, the children’s father. Florin challenged the many lies circulated by the police and national media outlets.

Florin and other relatives insisted that social workers were not present at any stage last Thursday to take the children into care, and that police alone removed the children.

He said: “How the children were removed was very bad. Putting handcuffs on a 14-year-old child. Using physical force on young children to take them away as they were crying ‘no, I want to stay with my family’.

“I have no words to describe these very bad things. The parents are very upset. The father is finished. He’s crying all the time.”

The incident that triggered the children’s removal happened in April. Maricel’s eight-year-old daughter had been playing with her two-year-old nephew when she dropped him. The child didn’t cry and the family didn’t realise until they saw a bump on the toddler’s head the next day. They took him straight to hospital.

Florin described media stories the children were “home alone” as a “big lie”. The children’s auntie, who is in her thirties, was home with them. The children are never left alone, Florin insisted, despite both parents working different shifts at a local factory.

Florin says many in the Romanian community are now scared to take children to hospital in case the same happens to them.

On Saturday, the children’s auntie was arrested, with Florin adding, “Nobody knows why. I asked the police. They said they were not allowed to give an explanation for why she was taken.” She was released on Sunday.

The family’s hospital visit in April resulted in a referral from social services, and social workers soon visited the family,

placing the couple's children into the care of their elder sister. Florin said the family has been given "no reasons" for the children's removal from their sister.

Local residents say there is a long history of Romanians and Roma being openly discriminated against by police and local authorities. Florin explained: "What happened here was the same as in 2010: aggressive policing.

"When the police see someone from a different country they stop them without any reason. They stopped me two times. I asked if I had done anything wrong, but they said it was just a check. But I have a driver's license, my road tax is paid. I work, I pay taxes here—why do they want to check me? Why don't we enjoy the same rights here as everyone else?

"We are called gypsy because our skin is a little bit dark, but we're not gypsy, we don't talk gypsy language, we're just talking Romanian."

Maricel and his family came to the UK four years ago. He and his wife work in the meat industry and work up to 12 hours a day for minimum wage.

Leeds: a microcosm of social polarisation

Starmer and Cooper's intervention over Harehills reflects extreme nervousness that the same social tensions that produced Thursday's riots exist in cities and towns across the UK.

Efforts since the 1990's to turn Leeds into a financial centre of the north have helped further socially polarise the city. Tory and Labour governments have implemented wave after wave of austerity.

Beyond the prosperous city centre are suburbs described by demographers as a "doughnut of deprivation". More than one in five Leeds residents live in poverty (176,376 people), while 31.3 percent of the city's children and young people (55,780 youngsters) live in poverty (above the national average of 29 percent).

Harehills is a poor, diverse working-class district less than two miles from the city centre. 38 percent of residents of Harehills and neighbouring Gipton described themselves in the most recent Census as being from Asian backgrounds, 36 percent white and 17 percent black. There is a more recent population of Romani in the area who are officially classified as Eastern European.

A combination of deteriorating social conditions and heavy-handed and discriminatory policing has made Harehills and surrounding areas a scene of rioting and social disturbances (often in conjunction with national riots) during the past half-century. This includes the Chapeltown riots in 1975, 1981 and 1987; Hyde Park Leeds riot in 1995; Harehills riot in 2001; Leeds Festival riot in 2002; and riots across England in 2011.

decade since ~~More~~ 2011 ~~It~~badon riots a and 25 years since the 2001 riots in Harehills, social conditions facing broad masses of workers and youth of all nationalities have worsened, as a direct result of policies aimed at enriching the financial and corporate oligarchy.

Social worker speaks out

On social media, social workers were among the many voices condemning Thursday's violent attack on children. A social worker from Yorkshire told WSWs: "Myself and a colleagues watched a video of two police officers dragging two children out of their home as if they were a threat to them. I felt physically sick and any decent thinking social worker would. I have attended many situations where sadly, for immediate safeguarding, a child or children have to go to a place of safety either temporarily or for good.

"Social workers are trained to de-escalate those very tense situations and safely and respectfully take the child. I have never seen this before and strongly condemn it. The police officers should be facing charges of assault on minors. The children and any child who witnessed this will be traumatised for life.

"I understand why the community were appalled and showed that in their protests. A few colleagues have said, would the police have done this to a wealthy family and question if this was because it was a poor immigrant family.

"I would call on all social workers to condemn the actions of the police and resist any attempts by the Labour government to submerge our profession with police under the Child Protection banner. Social Work values of fighting social injustice and anti-oppressive practice in no way align with fascistic bullying and assaults on children, clearly the value base of the police."



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