

# British trade union leaders suppress opposition to far-right riots to cover for Labour government

Tony Robson  
7 August 2024

Britain's trade union leaders have displayed their utter disregard for the dangers posed to the working class by the eruption of anti-migrant and anti-Muslim riots led by far-right groups, producing hand-wringing statements to cover their refusal to mobilise any opposition.

The trade unions officially represent millions of workers, meaning that any action called and fought for has the potential to mobilise a far more powerful force than those animated by fascist activists and their figurehead Tommy Robinson. Instead, the far-right have been allowed to run amok and conduct violent attacks on mosques, arson and assaults on asylum-seekers housed in hotels, hunting down anyone identified as non-white on the streets.

There could be a no more searing indictment of the claims by the trade union leaders to represent the "organised labour movement" than their sitting on their hands in the face of such a torrent of racist abuse and physical attacks meted out in working class communities this past week. Over the weekend the far-right mobs were on several occasions outnumbered by anti-fascist counter demonstrators, but none of these protests involved any contingents of workers organised by the trade union leadership.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) officially representing over 5.5 million workers only got around to producing even a press release on Friday August 2, four days into the right-wing rampage.

The "TUC anti right statement" consisted solely of worthless platitudes, such as, "Unity is our strength, and we will stand firm against those that aim to pit different workers and communities against each other."

Even as it acknowledged that "far right thugs have taken to the streets" venting "xenophobic hatred", not even a single protest was proposed. "Standing firm" for the well-heeled bureaucrats amounts to issuing a pro-forma statement praising the action of others such as the emergency services providing life-saving care and community activists rebuilding shattered neighbourhoods.

The union bureaucracy is more fearful of arousing a class response than of the threat posed by the far-right. It portrays the actions of fascistic mobs and the drawing in of sections of workers and young people into the rioting as an inexplicable development, disconnected from the lurch to the right of official politics. This would cut across its support for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government, which outflanked the Tories on immigration in the elections claiming that its Rwanda deportations scheme was not cost effective and had resulted in mass deportations being delayed. With its manifesto pledge to end "asylum hotels", the inflammatory anti-refugee language of Nigel Farage, now leader of the Reform UK party, was fully adopted.

The scapegoating of immigrants and refugees to divide the working class forms an essential component of Labour spearheading the austerity agenda demanded by the financial and corporate elite. The TUC is silent on the raft of anti-working class measures already enacted by Labour in its first month of taking office, which include the further privatisation of the National Health Service, maintaining the two-child cap on welfare benefits and depriving pensioners of winter fuel allowances as part of plans for a £23 billion austerity package.

It is the social distress produced by decades of austerity that the far-right exploits, with claims that migrants and refugees are a drain on vital resources. The TUC's pretence of opposing anti-migrant sentiment, divorced from a struggle against the austerity agenda of Labour, its anti-migrant policies and constant promotion of nationalism, militarism and war, is a transparent fraud.

If not for the treacherous role of the trade union leaders in betraying the 2022-3 strike wave against the Conservative government and backing Labour in supporting war in Ukraine and refusing to oppose the Gaza genocide, the situation facing workers today would be politically unrecognisable. The union bureaucracy ensured that Labour would not be brought into office on the back of a militant

movement of the working class to avoid an immediate showdown with its pro-business and austerity agenda with workers demanding an end to decades of austerity. Without this blocking of the class struggle, the far-right riots would not have been able to get off the ground. The below-inflation deals and surrendering of terms and conditions based on brutal restructuring was a downpayment on the corporatist set-up Starmer promised between the government, the trade unions and big business.

Taking its cue from the TUC's political whitewash, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) issued its press release on the far-right riots on Monday—six days after they started. It opens by complacently stating, “As you will know the past few days have seen acts of violence against Muslim and ethnic communities across the country.”

Echoing the description in the media of the riots as “demonstrations”, it referred to the fact 40 more were scheduled for Wednesday and more for the weekend. But after pointing this alarming situation out, it proposed no practical mobilisation. It offered instead the fob-off line, “We ask all our branch committees to contact local mosques, refugee centres and to offer our union's support.”

The press release, co-signed by CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and Head of Equality Kate Hudson blustered, “It is the job of trade unionists to deliver for workers and act as pillars of the community in bringing people together. The aims of the union and the labour movement are compromised and weakened if the agenda of race war beats the fight for workers unity.”

The reference to “workers unity” is an insult to every postal worker. All Ward has delivered is the restructuring agenda of Royal Mail, with the CWU acting in unity with company executives and major shareholders based upon the sellout deal last July to end the national strike ripping up terms and conditions and establishing an Amazon benchmark of exploitation. The CWU apparatus has overseen the roll out of a two-tier workforce with new entrants on inferior pay and terms. CWU officials electioneered for Labour, which has greenlighted the takeover bid of Royal Mail (and parent company IDS) by private equity firm EP Group while it has been in closed door talks with billionaire owner Daniel Kretinsky.

No fight for the unity of the working class against the stirring up of racial and national divisions can be entrusted to any section of the union bureaucracy, which is wedded to big business and its main political representative in the most right-wing government in history.

Pro-forma statements issued from on high only pre-empt what is required—an intervention by the working class—disarming those who want to fight and blocking any struggle against capitalism that would offer a mechanism for

addressing the social grievances exploited by the far-right and genuinely fighting for class unity.

The defence of refugees and the right to asylum must be fought for as a matter of class principle as part of a broader mobilisation of rank-and-file workers against the drive to war and militarism which is dependent on a clampdown on the democratic and social rights of the working class and the creation of a toxic political environment.

As the Socialist Equality Party statement, “Britain's far-right riots: The class issues” explains:

“It is the duty of the working class to come to the defence of immigrants and asylum-seekers, including protecting mosques and migrant hostels from attack. But this cannot be pursued in isolation from the necessary political struggle against the root cause of this malignant social development.

“This week's riots have not come from nowhere. The growth of fascist and far-right tendencies are a concentrated expression of imperialist politics and capitalist decay. The ruling elites are promoting extreme nationalism and xenophobia to divert explosive social tensions in a right-wing, anti-immigrant direction, to further Britain's predatory imperialist wars and to prosecute war against the democratic and social rights of the working class...

“The Socialist Equality Party and our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting for the development of an international anti-war movement, uniting all sections of the working class against war, austerity and fascism, in the worldwide struggle for socialism. That is the answer the working class must give to the far-right danger.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**