

Workers and young people speak at protests in Britain against far-right

Our reporters
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Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with protesters in London and Sheffield at Saturday's "Stand Up To Racism" demonstrations against the far-right.

Socialist Equality Party members distributed copies of a party statement, "Britain's far-right riots: The class issues" which was well received, provoking wide-ranging discussion.

London

Joel who works in education said, "I am very much a socialist. I did not vote for the Labour Party this time because of their stance on the genocide in Gaza. I think their stance on the pogroms this week, they have not called it what it is—racism. Capitalism is the ultimate enemy, it is the main cause of fascism, homophobia, racism, all sorts of things. So I think all roads lead to it needing tearing apart. I think we are seeing the decline of capitalism, it has proven to us since the pandemic that it is unstable. I think we have to keep pushing and keep fighting."

Rosie, an English teacher at a secondary school in Sutton said, "We wanted to come along today to be part of the pushback against the fascism and racism and criminality that we've seen on our streets in the last week or so.

"I've seen some really concerning footage of really young children, like primary age, or year 7-year 8 age, on the streets with their parents shouting the most horrendous racial slurs. It is hugely disturbing and it's a massive challenge for schools in terms of how we're going to work to tackle this from September. Obviously we'll come back to school in September and potentially children are going to be sat side by side with classmates who were a few weeks back out on the streets and hurling racial slurs or Islamophobic comments about. I think there's a lot of work to be done for us as educators to ensure we can heal these fractures within our schools and communities.

"I have an issue with the term 'British values'. I think it's hugely arrogant to suggest that only Britain has moral values, or that it does at all. I think that there's a lot of work to do and we're right to question how far this 'British values' agenda got us. ...

"Elon Musk has been stirring the pot online, Nigel Farage has been stirring things, Tommy Robinson from his lovely holiday hotspot in Cyprus is stirring the pot as well."

Rosie agreed, saying of the riots, "It's a top-down issue at the end of the day. It's not bottom up. It's about the decisions that have been taken by successive governments which have led to inflation and a rising cost of living, have decimated our mental health services, our National Health Service. It's decimated our education system now too, we've got huge teacher shortages. And all those things are now being borne out in our communities.

"People are struggling. Southport and some of the other areas where we saw the worst of the violence last week are some of the most deprived areas in the country. You can understand why people there feel angry, but they are pointing the finger in the wrong direction. We need to be punching up, not punching down or to the side.

"Muslims, asylum seekers, are not the people who took decisions around funding, who took economic decisions about the direction of our country. None of us took those decisions ultimately.

"I think it's really disappointing that Labour MPs haven't come out to events like this. I know that the one in Harrow on Wednesday wasn't attended by the Labour MP, but was attended by the independent there.

"Even looking at the treatment of the [Labour] MPs who voted to get rid of the two-child benefit cap [and were suspended by Starmer]. We've seen MPs who are outspoken on issues that are at the heart of the racism and fascism we've seen on our streets being significantly marginalised by the Labour Party."

Miranda, a solicitor, said, "I have very strong feeling about [Reform UK leader] Nigel Farage, because he's spoken at an AfD [Alternative for Germany] rally and because he's been recorded singing Hitler youth songs. And that he thought Hitler was a 'hypnotic speaker'. So, taking all those things together, I don't think it's an illegitimate question to ask if he's a fascist."

Miranda added that the fascists' ability to mobilise in Britain and the United States is "also about the failure of the left. Do we have a strong left in America and Britain? Not really. We've got Keir Starmer..."

She continued: "I don't think that the Labour Party really has any moral authority to talk about Islamophobia. Labour should take Islamophobia as seriously as it purports to take antisemitism. I don't know how seriously it takes antisemitism given that the far-right has been allowed to flourish under Labour. They've never taken Farage on, taken on his arguments about immigration. Instead, they've tried to appeal to this mythical 'heartland'

voter.”

Grace, who also teaches English at a school in Sutton, said, “From a teacher’s perspective, I can’t help thinking what impact this is having on young Muslim children and children of colour, watching this unfolding and feeling that kind of hatred around them. I also worry about the kids that are practically being groomed by their parents and by social media into joining these movements. That terrifies me as well. And I think as teachers particularly we have a responsibility to challenge those attitudes.

Grace said the riots resulted from a political culture of “blaming the shortcomings and the failures of capitalism on the people that are being exploited by it. You’ve got the white working class being told that the reason that this is all happening, it’s not the people that have power in society, it’s your Muslim neighbours, it’s people coming here stealing your jobs.”

Sheffield

In Sheffield around 1,200 attended the Stop Racism rally.

Alice and **Luke** were attending their first demonstration. Alice, a sales assistant, said: “Whilst I have been following events through social media, such as the war in Gaza and the far-right riots, seeing the scenes last weekend, of innocent people being attacked, I felt it was necessary to do more and participate. I felt I had to show my face and show that I am very against the hateful crimes and scenes taking place around the country. I had to show that I do not agree with the attacks on immigration rights.

“What we witnessed was racism and I am against it. I thought it’s important to show Keir Starmer and the government that they might stand by and watch as the racists attack people, but we are paying attention and will not stand back.

“I think the government’s intervention to stop the fascists was very slow. If it was any other group such as a black person involved in an attack, the response would be quicker.

“They [the government] allowed it to happen. They just allow divisions. It’s a different attitude to the Gaza protestors, calling them ‘hate marchers’.”

Luke, who works in waste management, said: “The anti-racist demonstrations were so much larger than the far-right riots. People have seen racism for what it is and more progressive ideas will come from this.”

Gabriel is a TV and film worker and **Alba** works for a charity. They are from Spain originally but now live in Sheffield.

Gabriel said, “We are immigrants ourselves, so we think it is important to be here and work with the people of Sheffield who I am so proud of as they have come out against racism and fascism. The counter protests have been larger than that of the racist riots.

“I think the far-right have come out, not just here but in other countries, because they can see a change. We saw mass movements and strikes last year, massive demonstrations against the war in Palestine and they are worried that society is going towards more positive and progressive policies. The fascists are like animals who are in a corner and make a last ditch attempt to

survive. Their aim is to divide the working class, by separating identities.

“The opponents of fascism are fighting for a better future for all humanity, not just a small group. We need to fight for a future that we control, that starts at the bottom up and not rely on governments, for true democratic control. Starmer won the elections only because the Tories were so hated. What he did to the left-wing in the Labour Party was truly horrendous.

“Coming from Spain and its history of fascism, I think the key to fighting fascism is international solidarity and unity.”

Sophie, a National Health Service dentist was also demonstrating for the first time. She said, “All this ‘protecting British values’, they can never define what the British values are, they always just start spewing racist nonsense.

“The mainstream media have focused on calling the riots ‘protests’, and people on social media has spread this. I think the media is here to divide us. Divisive politics and divisive talk get people clicking online and get people engaging more online in their little bubbles.

Sophie said the ruling class were supporting anti-immigration policies as, “It’s all about money. That’s what drives the people in power. They just want more money and they want to cause that divide. They try and split us up. It’s not the fault of us little dogs at the bottom, it’s the big dogs at the top.

“If the government takes things away from people constantly, they are going to try find someone to blame and it’s the unknown they’re going to blame because they’re scared of the unknown.

“You can see how much the NHS has been hurt after Brexit with fewer migrant workers. That’s part of the reason why it’s on its knees. We’ve got rid of part of the staff who were supporting it. Why would you not want people to come here and help our health service?”



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