



# The riots in Britain and capitalism's dead-end

In the aftermath of the riots which broke out across the country this week, the spokesmen of the ruling class – government, politicians, media, etc – are subjecting us to a deafening campaign aimed at getting us to support their 'programme' for the future: deepening austerity and increased repression against anyone who complains about it.

**Growing austerity**, because they have no answer to the terminal economic crisis of their system. They can only continue to keep cutting jobs, wages, social benefits, pensions, health and education. All this can only mean a worsening of the very social conditions that gave rise to the riots, conditions which are convincing a large part of an entire generation that they have no future ahead of them. Which is why any serious discussion about the social and economic causes of the riots is being denounced as 'excusing' the rioters. They are criminals, we are told, and they will be dealt with as criminals. End of story. Which is all very convenient, because the state has no intention of pouring money into the inner cities as it did after the riots of the 80s.

**Increased repression**, because that is what our rulers can offer us. They are going to take maximum advantage of public concern about the destruction caused by the riots to increase spending on the police, to equip them with rubber bullets and water cannon, even to bring in curfews and put the army on the street. These weapons, along with increased surveillance of web-based social networks and the summary 'justice' being handed out to those arrested after the riots, will not only be used against looting and random mayhem. Our rulers know full well that the crisis is giving rise to a tide of social revolt and workers' struggles which has spread from North Africa to Spain and from Greece back to Israel. They are perfectly aware that they will face such massive movements in the future, and for all their democratic pretensions they will be just as prepared to use violence against them as openly dictatorial regimes like Egypt, Bahrain or Syria. They already showed that during last year's student struggles in Britain.

## The 'moral high ground' of the ruling class

The campaign about the riots is based on our rulers' claim that they are occupying the moral high ground. It is worth considering the substance of these claims.

The mouthpieces of the state condemn the violence of the riots. But this is the state that is now inflicting violence on a far bigger scale against the populations of Afghanistan and Libya. Violence that is presented every day as heroic and altruistic when it serves only the interests of our rulers.

The government and the media condemn lawlessness and criminality. But it was the brutality of their very own forces of law and order, the police, which sparked the riots in the first place, from the shooting of Mark Duggan to the arrogant treatment of his family and supporters who demonstrated outside Tottenham police station demanding to know what had happened. And this comes on top of a long history of people from areas like Tottenham dying in police custody or facing

daily harassment on the streets.

The government and the media condemn the greed and selfishness of the looters. But they are the guardians and propagandists of a society which functions on the basis of organised greed, on the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority. Meanwhile the rest of us are ceaselessly encouraged to consume the products that realise their profits, to identify our worth with the amount of stuff we can afford to buy. And since inequality is not only built into this system, but is getting worse and worse, it is no surprise when those at the bottom of the pile, who can't afford the shiny things they are told they need, think that the answer to their problem is to nick what they can, when they can.

The rulers condemn this petty looting while participating in a vast operation of looting on the scale of the planet – the oil and logging corporations who ravage nature for gain, the speculators who are richly rewarded for pushing up the price of food, the arms dealers profiting from death and destruction, the respectable financial institutions who launder billions from the proceeds of the drug trade. An intrinsic part of this robbery is that a growing part of the exploited class is pushed into poverty, hopelessness, and crime. The difference is that the lowly law-breakers usually get punished, while the masters of crime do not.

In short: the morality of the ruling class does not exist.

## The real question: how to resist

The real question facing those of us – the vast majority – who do not profit from this gigantic criminal enterprise called capitalism is this: **h o w c a n w e d e f e n d o u r s e l v e s e f f e c t i v e l y** when this system, now visibly drowning in debt, is obliged to take everything from us?

Do the riots we have seen in the UK this past week provide a method for fighting back, for taking control, for uniting our forces, for carving out a different future for ourselves?

Many of those taking part in the riots were clearly expressing their anger against the police and against the possessors of wealth, who they see as the main cause of their own poverty. But almost immediately the riots threw up more negative elements, darker attitudes fed by decades of social disintegration in the poorest urban areas, of gang culture, of buying into the dominant philosophies of every man for himself and 'get rich or die trying'. This is how an initial protest against police repression got derailed by a chaos of frankly anti-social and anti-working class actions: intimidation and mugging of individuals, trashing of small neighbourhood shops, attacks on fire and ambulance crews, and the indiscriminate burning of buildings, often with their residents still inside.

Such actions offer absolutely no perspective for standing up to the thieving system we live under. On the contrary, they only serve to widen divisions among those who suffer from the system. Faced with attacks on local shops and buildings, some residents armed themselves with baseball bats and formed

'protection units'. Others volunteered for clean-up operations the day after the riots. Many ordinary people complained about the lack of police presence and demanded stronger measures.

Who will profit most from these divisions? The ruling class and its state. As we have said: those in power will now claim a popular mandate for beefing up the machinery of police and military repression, for branding all forms of protest and political dissent as forms of criminality. Already the riots have been blamed on 'anarchists' and only a week or two ago the Met made the mistake of publishing recommendations about grassing on people who are in favour of a stateless society.

The riots are a reflection of the dead-end reached by the capitalist system. They are not a form of working class struggle; rather they are an expression of rage and despair in a situation where the working class is absent as a class. The looting was not a step towards a higher form of struggle, but an obstacle in its way. Hence the justified frustration of the Hackney woman who has been watched by thousands on Youtube, denouncing the looting because it was preventing people from actually getting together and working out what the struggle was about. "*You lot piss me off...we are not all gathering together and fighting for a cause. We're running down Footlocker...*" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G18EmYGGpYI>

Gathering together and fighting for a cause: these are the methods of the working class; this is the morality of the proletarian class struggle, but they are in danger of being eaten away by atomisation and nihilism to the point where whole sectors of the working class have forgotten who they are.

But there is an alternative. The re-emergence of class identity, the reappearance of the class struggle, can be discerned in the massive and **i n c l u s i v e m o v e m e n t s** in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece or Israel. These movements, with all their weaknesses, give us a glimpse of a different way of fighting: through street assemblies where everyone can have a voice; through intense political discussion where every issue can be discussed; through organised defence against attacks by police and thugs, through workers' demonstrations and strikes; through raising the question of revolution, of a completely different form of society, one based not on dog eat dog but on solidarity between human beings, not on production for sale and profit but on the production of what we really need.

In the short term, because of the divisions created by the riots, because the state is having some success in plugging its message that any struggle against the present system can only end in wanton destruction, it is likely that the development of a real class movement in the UK is going to face even greater difficulties than before. But world-wide, the perspective remains: deepening crisis of this truly sick society, and increasingly conscious and organised resistance by the exploited. The ruling class in Britain will not be spared from either.

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