

LABOUR PARTY YOUNG SOCIALISTS

DEFEND BRIXTON



Brixton has erupted with an explosion of pent-up anger.

It was provoked by a massive police presence on Friday night and specifically, the fighting was started off on Saturday by one particularly brutal arrest at about 5pm on Saturday. The youth of the area hit back at the police.

The violence of the attack on the police shows the intense anger of the youth, especially the black youth, at oppressive police activity in the area.

Anger at the police has been intensified by the mounting number of racist and fascist attacks on black people and working class activists. While the police in many areas systematically harass and arrest black youth, little or nothing is done against those responsible for racist or fascist attacks.

Feelings of frustration and anger have also been intensified in the black community over the Deptford fire, in which 13 black people died. Few believe that the police are energetically trying to track down and arrest those responsible. In fact, investigations into the fire have involved even more harassment of black people.

The smashing and burning of big stores and shops in Brixton, at first completely wild and indiscriminate, demonstrates the bitter frustration of young people with no jobs, atrocious housing and living conditions, poor education and recreational facilities, and little or no hope of better things to come.

This was not a 'race riot'. Anger and violence was directed entirely against the police.

The fighting mostly involved blacks, but this is because it is mostly blacks who live in the decayed, central area of Brixton. But both black and white youth were involved in the fighting.

White people moving about the area of the fighting, of whom there were a great many, were not attacked, or threatened, or intimidated. A few white journalists were threatened, but only because they were at first thought to be plain-clothed policemen.

The assertion by the Metropolitan police chief, David McNee, that the fighting and burning was "planned and orchestrated by people from outside the area" is utter nonsense, the product of a blinkered police mentality.

The riot was spontaneous. It was sparked by provocative police action. But the inflammable material, in terms of atrocious social conditions and consistent police oppression, has been steadily building up for years.

The fighting had no clear aims. It was a spontaneous, unorganised impulsive expression of deep-rooted anger and frustration.

Most workers, including most black workers, do not accept that street fighting, burning and looting are the way to solve the problems facing us.

Responsibility for what happened lies squarely on the shoulders of the police and the authorities who provoked it.

The organised labour movement—the trade unions, the Labour Parties, and the Labour Party Young Socialists—must offer an organised, mass socialist alternative to the spontaneous, impulsive revolt of the youth.

The labour movement must immediately and urgently demand and campaign for:

(1) AN END TO POLICE REPRESSION:

○ Withdrawal of the massive police presence from the area.

○ The removal of the police cordon.

○ Build democratic street committees to involve all the people of the area, and link up with the trade unions, the Labour Parties and black organisations.

○ End the arbitrary stopping and searching now going on in the area.

○ The immediate release of those arrested on Saturday night.

○ Drop all charges.

○ Disband the SPG.

○ Democratic control of the Police.

(2) AN URGENT LABOUR MOVEMENT ENQUIRY:

The trade unions and Labour Parties in the area must immediately set up a commission to investigate the background and causes of what happened.

○ It should call on evidence and witnesses from all quarters, but especially from the youth and workers of the area.

○ Black youth and workers must be free to give their evidence and views without fear of intimidation.

○ The Commission's findings must be used in a campaign to tackle the real problems.

(3) STEP UP THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST SOLUTIONS TO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS UNDERLYING THE EXPLOSION:

○ Build a mass labour movement campaign to fight the people really responsible—big business and their political representatives, the Tories.

○ Fight to end unemployment.

○ For full training and a guaranteed job

for all school-leavers.

○ For an £80 minimum wage for all workers.

○ Fight the cuts: reverse the catastrophic spending cuts in local and central government expenditure.

○ For a massive programme of public works to create more houses, schools, hospitals and other vital facilities.

○ Bring down the Tory government.

○ Fight to return a Labour government, not to repeat the failures of previous Labour governments, but to implement a socialist programme for the socialist transformation of society.

○ Nationalise the big monopolies, with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need. Institute democratic workers' control and management, and introduce a socialist plan of production.

A long history of police harassment and repression

Thatcher's answer to Brixton's problems has been to step up police intervention. "The police asked for ..." was the reaction even of people who condemned the burning and looting.

Tension has been building up for a long time. Last Friday (10 April), a fight broke out when local people believed that the police were holding and grilling a man who had been seriously wounded in a fight.

A crowd quickly gathered. The attack on the police indicated the extreme mistrust and hostility the police have provoked by their tactics in the area.

On Saturday there was an atmosphere of extreme tension, further built up by heavy police patrols in the area, with various incidents.

But just before 5pm, two plain-clothed detectives arrested a young black in Atlantic Road.

Maureen Boyle, of the Brixton Advice Centre, described what happened: "One of the plain-clothed guys started saying 'You're nicked', he punched the black in the stomach. Everyone was saying that he'd done nothing. They dragged him into a police van. People smashed on the door of the Transit and a window got broken."

Fighting broke out, and missiles began to fly. From this a major battle escalated.

During the fighting, many people referred to incidents which have angered the black community in recent months:

No one was charged for the murder of Blair Peach in Southall; a mounting number of racist attacks (officially at least 1,000 in the last 18 months); the death of a young black, Richard Campbell, in Ashford Remand Centre; no one arrested or charged for the arson in Deptford which led to the death of 13 blacks; and there are many other incidents which could be added.

Since the Special Patrol Group went into Brixton in 1978 antagonism to police tactics has steadily built up. Arbitrary stopping, arrests, with numerous allegations of police brutality, are daily facts of life in Brixton, particularly for young blacks.

In the 'mopping up' late on Saturday night the police left no doubt about their attitude. Both black and white youth were beaten by the police and arbitrarily arrested.

Cars, particularly those with black drivers, were arbitrarily stopped and searched in an intimidating manner.

On Saturday evening, the police chiefs were warned that to send in more police would escalate the violence. They refused to listen to black community leaders who were attempting to calm down the situation.

Massive police forces were sent in—with the result that there was further escalation of violence.

Now the whole area is cordoned off with a massive police presence. This does not solve one single problem. On the contrary, it can only provoke more hostility and more violence.

The police must be withdrawn. Harassment must stop.

The central area of Brixton has long been a disaster area in terms of social conditions.

Over half of the 16 to 19 year olds are unemployed in the inner-city area of the Borough of Lambeth. Twenty percent or more are black youth. In the central Brixton area the percentage is even higher.

Large areas of Brixton should have been demolished years ago.

This area has been scheduled for redevelopment since 1928. Rotten slums are not being cleared because there is nowhere to rehouse their occupants. This is how ghettos are created.

Now the Tory government has brought new house building to a standstill. Yet there are 17,000 on the housing waiting lists, with another 400 being added every month. A proposed health centre for the area has recently been scrapped because of the cuts.

Education, too, has been hit by the cuts, when the exceptional needs of children in this area are crying out for a massive injection of resources.

Sport, recreational, and other leisure facilities for youth in the area are totally inadequate. What there is, is often too expensive for poorly paid youth.

Already atrocious conditions have been made even worse under the Thatcher government. The massive rise of unemployment and the cuts are having a devastating effect on working people, despite Lambeth council's attempts to resist the full effect of cuts imposed by the Tory government.

Thatcher's solution to the misery, the frustration, and the desperation of rising unemployment and increasing poverty is—to send in the Special Patrol Group in an attempt to clamp down 'law and order' on the area.

These are the things that have produced an explosion, not McNee's mythical plotters.

The Labour Party Young Socialists has warned many times that there would be an explosion if the problems of unemployment and cut living standards, and hopeless prospects for the future were not tackled urgently.

What has now happened in Brixton underlies the urgency of the labour movement working to build a mass movement to fight on jobs, wages, living standards, and vital services.

All the movement's resources, particularly shop stewards' committees and trade union branches must be mobilised.

The fight to defend the people of Brixton is part and parcel of the fight to bring down the Tory government. It is a fight against big business and the rotten conditions produced by a system based on private property and the anarchy of the market.

It is the fight to bring down the Tory government which upholds this rotten system.

It is the fight for the return of a Labour government pledged to the implementation of bold socialist policies that would bring about a fundamental shift in wealth and power from big business to working people.

DEFEND BRIXTON! PUBLIC MEETING

7.30pm Wednesday, 15th April, 1981
Brixton Town Hall, SW2

Speakers: John Tilley MP
Bob Lee (PNP
Black Socialist Youth Movement)
Kevin Ramage
(LPYS Chairman)

For more information about the LPYS fill in the coupon below

Name

Address

Tel. No.

Send to K Ramage, c/o, A Bevan, 150 Walworth Rd,
London SE17