

UK government encourages fascist provocation to justify police crackdown

By Thomas Scripps
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John Apter, Chairman of the Police Federation for England and Wales and Ken Marsh, chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation, have called on the Johnson government to ban all protests for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apter said “I urge the home secretary [Priti] Patel to be unequivocal in her terms that whilst we are under the threat of this virus, any large gathering or protest must be banned.”

Marsh told LBC radio, “It is unlawful what is taking place under the Covid legislation. Ban them.”

The pretext for this call was provided by the Johnson government and the media, which set the stage for a fascist provocation in London Saturday, to legitimise a crackdown on those protesting the US police murder of George Floyd.

Early last week, Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted of the protests organised against Floyd’s killing, “These demonstrations have been subverted by thuggery. ... Those responsible will be held to account.”

Patel denounced “thugs”, “criminals”, “mobs” and “hooliganism” and said the “criminals responsible are already being brought to justice.”

Founders of the fascist English Defence League (EDL) and Britain First groups, Tommy Robinson and Paul Golding, duly published videos saying the police had lost their grip on the protesters. They urged support for a “defend our memorials” event, organised by the “Democratic Football Lads Alliance”—through which the fascists seek to plug into a broader right-wing milieu—to take place around Winston Churchill’s statue in Parliament Square. The monument was boxed off by Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan after a statue of slave trader Edward Colston was toppled by protesters in Bristol on June 7 and Churchill’s plinth was spray-painted with the words “was a racist.”

Johnson declared supposed “threats” against

Churchill’s statue “absurd and shameful”, stating that George Floyd demonstrations had been “hijacked by extremists intent on violence” and that the weekend rallies would “end in deliberate and calculated violence.”

He fired off a record eight tweets just hours before the protest, with one declaring, “It is absurd and shameful that this national monument should today be at risk of attack by violent protesters.” Patel called for Churchill’s statue to be “liberated.”

This was the government’s *cri de coeur*, summoning around 2,000 fascists to “defend” Churchill’s statue. The drunken mob shouted racial slurs at passers-by and chanted “England” while giving Nazi salutes. Unable to reach a small number of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters in Trafalgar Square, they threw smoke grenades, glass bottles and flares and started punch-ups with the police. At least 100 people were arrested for offences including violent disorder, assault on the police, possession of a weapon and drunkenness.

Journalists were threatened, and one Italian reporter was attacked and left bloodied.

Smaller groups did break through and assaulted the BLM demonstration, but most came off worse from the encounter. Over 1,000 fascists refused to leave after a 5 p.m. curfew was enforced, engaging in more clashes with the police and roaming around London looking for confrontations. Confrontations with BLM protesters also took place around Hyde Park.

Tory and Labour politicians and the media condemned the violence for which Johnson is responsible, while drawing an equal sign between the fascists and “left extremists” who “hijacked” the Floyd protests. The *Daily Mail* wrote, “the anti-racist rally and a pro-statue counter-protest descended into hooliganism driven by a hard core of violent activists on both sides.” A peaceful protest of a “small number of pro-statue military veterans in uniform” had been “hijacked by others intent on

confronting police and BLM supporters.”

Johnson tweeted, “These marches and protests have been subverted by violence.” Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer criticised “violence against our police.”

The stage has been set for a law-and-order campaign, directed against popular protests involving hundreds of thousands against racism and police brutality.

Patel and Justice Secretary Robert Buckland, as reported by the *Daily Mail*, are planning “a response to anti-racism protests, based on the response to the 2011 London riots, urging magistrates’ courts to extend opening hours and fast-track any cases relating to protests.”

A photo of a far-right protester urinating next to a memorial to a police officer killed in a terror attack in 2017 is being used by over 100 Tory MPs to push through a Desecration of War Memorials Bill, which could see protesters who “damage” war memorials jailed for up to 10 years. Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds said he would back jail terms for people who vandalised monuments.

From the moment Robinson began plotting his “patriotic unity” event, the conclusion was always set to be a state crackdown on the working class, youthful protesters and the left.

Recent weeks have confirmed the massive anti-racist sentiment and hostility to the state and its far-right supporters. On Saturday, a demonstration of around 15,000 people took place in Brighton and by tens of thousands more in over a dozen major cities across the UK, including Bristol, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Bath, Cardiff, Newport, and Glasgow.

But this developing movement is in danger not only from the state and the far right, but of being divided and dispersed by the racist, pro-capitalist political perspective of the Black Lives Matter organisation.

BLM seeks to turn the objective striving of the working class, and particularly the youth, for unity against class oppression—contained in the George Floyd protests—into a culture war framed around a supposedly fundamental racial divide. It denies that racism is a mechanism to divide and rule by the capitalist class and blames it on “white people” and “white privilege”, opposing a unified struggle of workers against capitalism, against class oppression, in favour of support for “black capitalism”, of “equality of oppression” with more black people in corporate management, etc.

Calling off Saturday’s planned BLM protest in London and moving it to Friday, Imarn Ayton told the BBC, “I

think everyone is very worried about any type of race war that could occur because that takes away from what we’re trying to achieve, which is abolishing institutional racism.”

At the same time, she said of the statue of Churchill and other statues listed by BLM as associated with the slave trade and racism, “I believe these statues should be moved to a museum. I think it’s a win-win for everyone. It no longer offends the black nation, but we get to keep our history and keep those that would like to see that.”

The reference to a “race war”, and appeals to a “black nation,” are a slander on the working class designed to subordinate black workers to the selfish strivings for social advancement of the black middle class and bourgeoisie.

What is posed is not an offensive against statues reflecting the legacy of slavery, but a struggle by the entire working class, black, white and Asian, against the very real and very contemporary dangers of state violence to defend and perpetuate wage slavery.

It is testimony to the political dead-end of the war on statues that the Labour Party has latched on to this diversionary agenda, which allows guardians of an increasingly brutal capitalist state to pose as fighters for “justice.”

Sadiq Khan has announced that a Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm will review landmarks in the capital. Following his lead, 130 Labour councils have promised to “review the appropriateness of local monuments and statues.”

The organised hypocrisy reached sickening levels, with a photo of former Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and current Labour leader Starmer “taking the knee” in his office. While serving as DPP, Starmer worked to hinder prosecutions of the police killers of Jean Charles de Menezes and Ian Tomlinson, implemented measures to help police suppress protests against austerity, and praised the rubber-stamp prosecution of young people after the 2011 London riots.

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