

*Riots sweep UK as fascists use
stabbing attack to fuel racist
rampage against immigrants*



London, August 6 (RHC)-- Racist political rhetoric laid the groundwork for the far right rampage against immigrants, Muslims and Black people. Racist mobs continued their rampage through the UK this weekend, throwing bricks, setting fires, smashing windows, threatening mosques and attacking hotels housing asylum seekers.

The street-fighting fascist mobs, disproportionately made up of young, white men, have targeted Black people and Muslims, chanting anti-immigrant slogans and embracing much of the same language as was used in the U.S. by neo-Nazi protesters at the infamous 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville,

Virginia.

The explosion of far right violence against asylum seekers and Muslims came as fascists spread a frenzy of misinformation on social media in the wake of a mass stabbing committed by a teenager born in Cardiff, Wales, who was in fact neither Muslim nor an asylum seeker.

The stabbing, took place last Monday, and was committed by a knife-wielding 17-year-old in the English town of Southport. By the time he was stopped by police, three young girls at a yoga-dance and yoga class had been fatally wounded, several more children were in critical condition, and two adults who tried to intervene were also seriously injured. It was a truly horrific event, redolent of the mass-shooting sprees that have so bedeviled the U.S. in recent years.

But then, the already awful situation suddenly got even worse. Within minutes of the killings, rumors began circulating online that the attacker was either a Muslim or an undocumented immigrant or both. And, in quick succession far right mobs descended first on the mourning town of Southport, and then, within days, on central London and several other cities, including Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Hull, Nottingham and Belfast in Northern Ireland. They have, in the week since, targeted mosques, hotels housing asylum seekers and then the police.

The violent attacks have now spread to more than a dozen cities, with hundreds arrested and with the government so concerned that Yvette Cooper, the new home secretary, is reportedly considering introducing emergency legislation to try to reimpose public order on a rapidly metastasizing situation, and prime minister Keir Starmer, himself a former crown prosecutor, has warned the racist mobs that the full force of the law will be brought against them. Earlier today, Starmer and Cooper participated in a COBRA meeting – COBRA being the committee used to bring key government and national security players together during national emergencies – and promised to unleash a “standing army” of specialist officers against the rightwing mob.

But it will take more than just riot police to defuse a situation that has gotten entirely out of control in large part because of the extraordinary speed with which misinformation now circulates through social media. It will also take a concerted effort to hold social media companies accountable for the lies spread on their sites, and it will take a serious effort by the courts and other institutions to counter this misinformation in real time. Late last week, the judge presiding over the case of the arrested 17-year-old, attempted to do just that: in an effort to defuse the social media rumor mill around the murders in Southport, he allowed the media to reveal the teenager’s name and origin. His name, it turns out, is Axel Muganwa Rudakubana. He was born in Cardiff, Wales, to parents who themselves were of Rwandan origin: he isn’t an undocumented immigrant, he isn’t an asylum-seeker, he isn’t a Muslim.

Observers say that Britain’s homegrown fascists have opportunistically used these killings to whip up support for their racist effort to bar immigrants from the UK and to terrorize many of those already within the country. As a result, an unfathomable tragedy that ought to have brought communities together in grief has been exploited by violent rioters — heirs to the right-wing football hooligans of the 1980s and 1990s, who engaged in bloody fights for turf and reputation — trying to burn down mosques and hotels for asylees.

This fascist rhetoric hasn’t emerged in a vacuum: for years, the Conservative government deployed inflammatory rhetoric against asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. They made “stop the boats” a political rallying cry, and they spent a huge amount of political capital attempting to implement a deportation policy whereby a number of asylum seekers would be summarily deported to Rwanda. Anti-immigrant bigotry fueled support for Brexit in 2016, and in the years following, anti-immigrant rhetoric has turbocharged a mean-spirited vision of English nationalism and a hardline version of Conservative Party orthodoxy.

In the parliamentary elections last month, the headline story was the Labour Party's victory; the secondary story — that may in the long run prove to be more significant — was the rise of Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform Party, which peeled off nearly half of the Conservative vote with its support for an immigration freeze, and its rhetoric about immigrants causing a cultural decline. For the first time, the Reform Party ended up with elected members of Parliament — five of them. More significantly, it received 14 percent support, more than 4 million votes, and came second in nearly 100 parliamentary constituencies, the vast majority of these being in seats that Labour won.

Labour's victory masks the fact that in much of the country the 2024 election catapulted Reform into being the de facto party of opposition, and this has triggered an internal reckoning within the Conservative Party that is seeing a significant portion of the party moving ever further rightward and largely embracing Reform Party rhetoric. (While most Conservatives haven't supported the rioters this week, at least one senior Conservative did come out with a statement that seemed to at least give succor to the far right, arguing that the riots were a "symptom" of mass opposition to migration and of the government's failure to lower migration levels in the years following Brexit.)

Now a member of Parliament in the UK, Farage has used his new platform to continue to stir up race hatred, much as the infamous politician Enoch Powell did in the late 1960s, when he warned of "rivers of blood" in British streets as a consequence of mass immigration. Meanwhile, online followers of the paramilitarist anti-immigration organizer Tommy Robinson, whose English Defense League has engaged in violence against immigrants and people of color for years, have used the horrors of Southport to bring far right rioters out onto the streets.

Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, was deplatformed by Twitter in 2018 for his promotion of violence and his dissemination of conspiracy theories. Last year, however, Elon Musk brought him back online. Since then, his ability to mobilize far right mobs has only grown: in late July, he orchestrated a demonstration in the center of London that brought upward of 20,000 flag-waving followers out to Trafalgar Square.

Anti-racist organizers in the U.K., as well as the British government, have argued that this past week's riots have been facilitated by social media companies' inability to — or disinterest in — reining in Robinson and his followers. Hope Not Hate has referenced a "blizzard of false information" in the hours following the Southport killings. The result has been disastrous: violent, far right rioting has convulsed the British Isles.

But it would be wrong to simply lay the blame for this upheaval at Elon Musk's feet. Yes, the titans of social media are irresponsible in the extreme for magnifying the toxic messages of people such as Robinson. But the culture of intolerance toward migrants in the U.K. has been a long time in the making, and far too many politicians have been stoking anti-immigrant bigotry as a way to score cheap political points.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/362073-riots-sweep-uk-as-fascists-use-stabbing-attack-to-fuel-racist-rampage-against-immigrants>



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