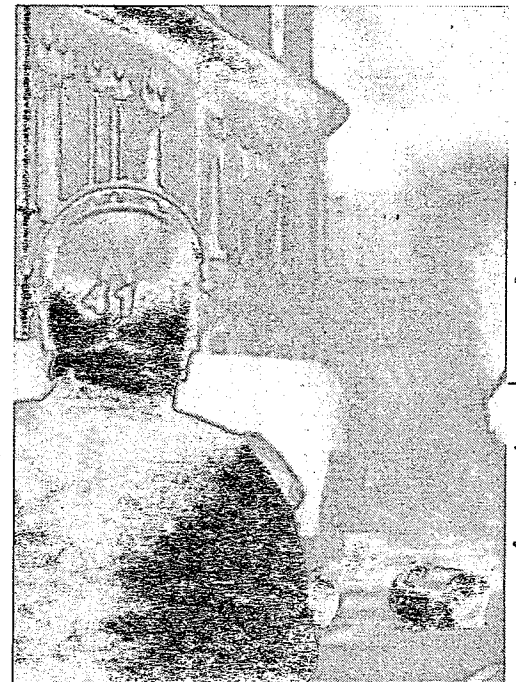


Britain's Proletarian Youth: Smouldering Fire Flares Up



In August in Birmingham, the industrial heartland of England, John Shorthead, a five-year-old white child, was shot dead in his bed by police who had broken into the house searching for the child's father. Within hours, enraged crowds wrecked police cars and sent a constable to the hospital. He was only the first of scores, as in the weeks that followed districts in Liverpool and London too, with heavy concentrations of immigrants from the Caribbean, exploded in free-wheeling battles between riot



Again

police and those who Britain's cops like to refer to as "the bastards."

The spark that set off the conflagration in the Brixton district of London was the police murder of a woman. In the course of searching for a youth, they broke into his home with a sledge-hammer and then shot his 38-year-old mother pointblank. Scotland Yard called this a "carefully planned and properly executed operation." In Tottenham, during another police break-in, yet another mother died on the way to the hospital with a

heart-attack—*after* they had roughed her up, all the while scoffing at her kids' warning about her heart trouble. The ruling Conservative Party's summation of the cause of the rebellions which followed these events was delivered by Home Secretary Douglas Hurd: "The roots of these acts lie in greed and the excitement of violence." He was not, of course, talking about his murdering pigs.

In one after another of these incidents, large formations of cops were forced into protracted battles against hundreds and even thousands who met them with rocks, bottles, and Molotov cocktails. Official England was particularly incensed by occasions when the cops were evidently lured into areas where they could be—and were—ambushed. Broadwater Farms Estate housing project, heretofore considered a "showcase" by the government, had its label changed overnight to "nightmare": the upper-level walkways connecting the series of buildings were used time and again by the youth there to rain missiles down on cops and then quickly melt away. Widespread bitterness for and hatred of the cops was manifest; the London *Guardian* admitted that the "troublemakers" appeared to have wide support from many hundreds of people on the streets, including blacks, whites, Asians, women, young and old. At each spot where the rioters and police appeared the cry 'murderers' went up." The cops were surprised repeatedly by the savagery of the attacks on their ranks—by early October, one had been killed and two critically injured. This display of fury was touted by respectable commentators as evidence that the events were the work of alien-types—that they had nothing to do with the real England and its traditional "keep a stiff upper lip" spirit. Enoch Powell renewed his calls to expell the immigrants and decried that England may be in the process of disintegration, ceasing to really be "a nation."

But it does indeed remain a nation—an imperialist one, as ugly and chauvinist as ever, but now with less means to heal over all the divisions of that society. Sixty years ago Liverpool was the crown jewel of a

far-flung empire. Now the docks of the old Cunard Line creak with wood-rot—the unemployment rate is nearing one out of three. Among black youth leaving school in Birmingham's Handsworth district in the last four months, only one in twenty has found work. The minor injections of funds into community programs following the rebellions of 1981 have done virtually nothing but add riot control police on the one hand, and prop up a small layer of "community leaders" on the other. Thatcher called on both to end the rebellions.

These are weapons which the government will continue to use to deal with Britain's "divided cities." New legislation has been proposed outlawing "disorderly conduct" in order to give the cops even more leash on the streets. The police have also loudly publicised—"so that all Londoners will know"—that they are now armed with rubber bullets (sometimes lethal) and tear-gas, hitherto reserved for putting down the Irish and never before used on English soil. The Labour Party bemoaned the situation and called for a commission to study the "deeper causes"—which was already done following the 1981 upheavals, at nauseating length, and a repeat of which would no longer have even the limited demagogic value of the first go-around. Anyway, the government showed just how deeply it intended to probe when Tory Party head Archer stated, "I know what unemployment is—to find work, you have to move a bit."

Dividing lines in British society have sharpened—but hardly along the lines of black vs. white as portrayed by the press, of immigrants standing alone against a united England in some sort of mythical Churchillian tradition. Rebel punks, Asians and others pummelled cops alongside the black youth in more than one city. The impact of world events also continues to sharpen these divisions—Irish-style masks were common, and Zulu chants too were heard...as England burned. □

