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On the night of the 22 and 23 May 2023, the Cardiff suburb of Ely was rocked by riots following the deaths of two teenagers: Kyrees Sullivan, 16, died with his friend Harvey Evans, 15. The boys were chased by the police in the minutes leading to their deaths but, as it shall be discussed, things were not as they appeared to be. In the aftermath of the tragic deaths of these boys, suspicion circulated among the residents that the police had been involved in the deaths leading to the eruption of a riot late into the night and early morning of 23 May.

The town is considered one of the poorest communities in Wales and the UK¹. This is not the first riot to occur in the area. In 1991, Ely faced unrest following the destructive policies of Margaret Thatcher which had caused unemployment and poverty in the area to rise quickly.

It is clear that there were pre-existing tensions within the community over their misery and exploitation going back decades; considering that Britain is now facing a profound cost-of-living crisis that is driving more and more proletarians to the brink of abject poverty (some have resorted to eating pet-food to survive²) unrest was sure to occur. But the nature of the incident also reveals another facet of bourgeois rule: police oppression.

The residents of Ely were informed by word of mouth and by social media that the police were involved in the incident, having allegedly chased the two young men (who were on electric bikes) with a van. The South Wales police quickly denied that this was the case, with the police commissioner Alun Michael, stating on the 23rd, that: 'It would appear that there were rumours, and those rumours became rife, of a police chase - which wasn't the case.'³ This narrative was initially parroted by the bourgeois media. This was reiterated the following day, with the police commissioner telling Radio Wales Breakfast, 'I was assured [by the police] and I am still assured, that the youths were not being chased by the police at the time of the road traffic accident,'⁴ which was quickly debunked later that day.

It emerged very quickly that there was CCTV footage which showed the boys cycling just a few minutes before the collision that caused their deaths and that they were being followed by a police van. However, what was surprising was despite evidence circulating that the police were not only in the vicinity, but right behind the teenagers, the police continued to deny that there were police there. South Wales Police stated that it was 'studying' the video but reiterated that 'there were no police vehicles on Snowden Road [the site of the crash] at the time of the crash';⁵ when asked about his previous statements, Alun Michael denied that he had been 'misinformed' when he previously claimed that no police chase had occurred.

'What happened was footage emerged of something that happened a short time before the road traffic accident, and that too needs to be investigated,' he said.

'That was not available to the police or to me at the time when we responded to the first thing that happened, which was a road traffic accident.'

It was put to Mr Michael that this leaves open the possibility of a pursuit and he replied: 'It leaves open the possibility.'⁶

Shortly after this in the face of insurmountable evidence, South Wales Police admitted that it did indeed follow the teenagers before their deaths and referred

itself to the police watchdog, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), over the chase.

It is here that the bourgeois media ends their narrative; the matter is considered resolved and little attention should be paid since “the experts are handling it.” This however hides the reality of the situation; in the frenzy of what transpired, little attention was paid as to why and how the riot started.

Word spread of the police cover-up, mere hours after the incident. A friend of the victims, who wished not to be named, stated: ‘The police have been lying since this happened. They’ve only admitted they were involved in a chase because the footage came out.’⁷ It has been alleged that before the footage was published detectives were asking residents if they had seen the video, indicating knowledge before-hand that evidence of the chase existed and were seeing if it was sufficiently suppressed.⁸ This was all but confirmed days later by relatives of the teens who had said social media had spread the CCTV footage, which served as a catalyst for the riot, meaning the community were fully aware of what had transpired.⁹

The media allege that the riot started at around 9pm BST with few referencing deprivation as possible factors.¹⁰ However, there were more than three hours between the fatal collision and the beginning of the unrest; according to eyewitnesses at the site, backed by photographic evidence, the police were numerous, having gathered as a seeming show of force and were allegedly aggressive in their behaviour, stoking tensions among the residents who would soon become incensed once CCTV footage began circulating.¹¹ But this is not enough to cause a riot, plenty of other communities across the UK suffer from deprivation and poverty but have not resorted to violence to voice their anger; the cause of the unrest in Ely must have deeper roots.

The aggressive behaviour of the supposed protectors of law and order is but the tip of the iceberg; South Wales Police has had a notorious history of abuse and corruption. This police force acts with impunity: it has ‘the highest number of officers and staff involved in allegations of violence against women and girls – accounting for 63 percent of all complaints against Welsh police forces;’¹² it is known to use violent physical force during arrests and was on the verge of being dissolved ten years ago by the Home Office over rampant corruption and obstruction of justice. When put into this context it becomes clearer as to why the residents were so hostile to law enforcement. Parallels between past behaviour and the events of Ely are too stark to ignore.



Police arriving at the scene en masse at around 21:11

Firstly, the pursuit of the children follows a pattern of excessive misconduct proven as recently as April of 2023. On Friday 7 April 2023, former PC Julian John had allegations which were found proven by a disciplinary board of being in an inappropriate relationship with a vulnerable woman and of having carried out breathalyser tests on himself in order to fulfil targets.¹³ He would have been dismissed had he not already retired, meaning that no punishment will be faced by Mr. John.

Days later the IOPC published on the 12th of April that gross misconduct was proven against a South Wales Police officer who repeatedly punched a man during an unlawful arrest which he subsequently lied about.¹⁴ This is but two incidents which occurred just weeks ago, with a serving officer of SWP being found to have indecent images of children being reported at the end of last month¹⁵ and an ongoing investigation in the death of a man in custody that occurred in October 2022.¹⁶ There are most likely hundreds of similar incidents both reported and unreported spanning over decades. Thus the behaviour of South Wales Police both during the pursuit of the teens and after the incident were not mere one-offs; it is just the latest

in routine misconduct, not the fault of “a few bad eggs.”

Given how Ely is one of Cardiff’s poorest and most deprived areas due to the austerity and off-shoring of the recent decades of liberal reforms, the routine abuse suffered by the residents from the police would have been intolerable. When the current cost-of-living crisis is taken into consideration, the people of Ely are at their breaking point and the deaths of two young men in suspicious circumstances were too much to bear.

Secondly, the behaviour of the police surrounding the information regarding the circumstances of the deaths of Sullivan and Evans also fit a pattern that added suspicion that the police were not being open about what transpired.

The implication that SWP had full knowledge of evidence proving that their actions contributed to the deaths and subsequent riots have substantial evidence. As mentioned, there appears to be evidence that the police were aware of the CCTV footage, at the very least just before the riot occurred. Considering the repeated statements by officials that the police were not involved were proven wrong once the footage was made public, one has to then ask: why would they make these statements, knowing that they would be proven wrong?

As stated above, it is alleged that detectives were asking residents about the footage before the news broke; several cameras captured the pursuit meaning that there was footage the police would not have been aware of i.e. a paper trail that was longer than the police expected. It could be argued that the police were attempting to ascertain if the footage that started the riot had not circulated into the national media not realising that there was more evidence that could disprove their claims.

This follows similar events that occurred in the 1990s where SWP was found to have falsely accused several innocent men for the tragic murder of Lynette White leading to their false convictions.¹⁷ When the verdicts were quashed on appeal an investigation was launched which revealed gross misconduct, corruption and evidence tampering by SWP.

The trial was considered the biggest police corruption case in British history: 30 people were arrested in 2005; 19 of whom were either serving or retired officers; 3 of the prosecution witnesses who had testified in court in the Lynette White case were convicted for perjury serving 18 months each in 2007; in 2009 a further two witnesses from the original trial were charged with perjury¹⁸; they along with eight others stood trial in 2011 charged with perverting the course of justice (similar to obstruction of justice in US law) which carried the maximum penalty of life imprisonment, with a further four officers due to stand trial on the same charges in 2012.

In November of 2011 the case collapsed as the defence submitted that copies of files they should have seen had instead been “destroyed.” The judge (on the orders of Keir Starmer, who was the most senior public prosecutor at the time and now Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons) ruled that because they could not receive a fair trial, the case could not continue in court and subsequently all fourteen accused were acquitted. The “destroyed” files were found in January 2012 still in the original box sent by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (which investigates police corruption).¹⁹

It is clear that suppression of information, lying and abuse of power are common occurrences in South Wales, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. Considering the prior history of South Wales Police (along with many other cases which could not be mentioned in this article for the sake of brevity), it is well within reason that SWP could very well have been terrorising these teens, attempted to cover up the incident and provoked a riot to shift attention away

from them.

The behaviour of South Wales Police both in the past and surrounding the deaths of Kyress and Harvey reveal the purpose of the police in bourgeois society. Contrary to how they present themselves, the thin blue line between order and societal collapse, the police in actuality are nothing more than institutional violence with the express purpose of protecting bourgeois rule and capitalist property.

The true purpose of the police was succinctly described by Marx and Engels in their ground-breaking analysis of political economy and the class basis of the state. As the state is an institution created by class struggle between the exploited and exploiters to manage the class antagonisms of society and to prevent the eruption of a revolution. Lenin in *The State and Revolution* described it thusly:

*'It is impossible because civilised society is split into antagonistic, and, moreover, irreconcilably antagonistic classes, whose "self-acting" arming would lead to an armed struggle between them. A state arises, a special power is created, special bodies of armed men, and every revolution, by destroying the state apparatus, shows us the naked class struggle, clearly shows us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of armed men which serve it, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organisation of this kind, capable of serving the exploited instead of the exploiters.'*²⁰

The police and army are these armed bodies, their express purpose is to maintain the capitalist society; the society of owners; the society of the exploited majority and an exploiting minority. When bourgeois obscurantism is suppressed, the reality of the state and its armed bodies (here the police) become clear as day. Put in this context the actions of South Wales Police is, therefore, unsurprising; as the armed institution of the capitalist class, their role is to threaten and coerce the proletariat either subtly or openly.

This pernicious institution operates on an identical basis in every capitalist state, and mete out the same measure of justice. The world stood fixed on the police terror faced by Americans during the many protests against racist killings of Black people, the racial basis for their unifying narrative failed to fully reveal the intense class antagonisms at play. When called to action, the police will jump to execute the will of the bourgeoisie, manifesting the violent arm of capitalist dictatorship as the inevitable result of the class struggle between the working class and the capitalist class.

Sources: 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18;

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