

Riots shake Britain as depression deepens

by Volker Hassmann

It's a "hot summer" for Britain this year, after a series of violent urban youth riots shook the country in mid-July, starting in Coventry and sweeping through Stockton-on-Tees, Bristol, and Salford into Lancashire and West Yorkshire. The worst incident was in Blackburn in the north of England, where a crowd of Indian youths attacked and severely damaged a cafe. Eleven police officers were hurt, cars destroyed, and street lighting smashed as rampaging youths hurled gasoline bombs and stones. Ethnic tension had been building in Blackburn's Brookhouse district for a year. In the town of Huddersfield, 100 young people hurled objects at police who had earlier arrested five suspected drug dealers. Twenty-one police officers were injured, three seriously. Barry Sheerman, the Member of Parliament for Huddersfield and "shadow" home affairs spokesman, called on the government to take emergency action: "The government is passively watching as police are left to cope with social forces beyond their control."

The outbreak of urban anarchy in Britain is a symptom of growing social disintegration, in the worst economic depression that the country has experienced since the 1930s. But it is unlikely that the riots are merely a spontaneous eruption, and certainly a role by agents provocateurs cannot be ruled out. As *EIR* documented in the case of the riots in Los Angeles, California (*EIR*, May 15, "Did Warren Christopher Torch Your Neighborhood?"), the Anglo-American establishment manipulates such violent outbreaks for its own purposes of social control, and to promote its fascist economic and social agenda.

U.K. youth unemployment is running at 15%, while Britain has accounted for nearly half the rise of 9.5% in European Community unemployment, to 14 million total. According to a report by National Westminster Bank, unemployment in the southeast of England, including London, will rise 18% to 1 million by June next year. The government's "anti-inflation" policies are producing social misery of a horrifying scope. The number of people who earn less than half of the average income has more than doubled to 12 million under the Tory governments; one out of four children lives in absolute poverty. The government of Prime Minister John Major has now imposed the toughest austerity straitjacket since the

Conservatives came to power 13 years ago, with large cuts in welfare, infrastructure projects, construction, and inner cities development programs. The Treasury plan reportedly caused consternation among senior ministers at the cabinet meeting over the scale of the measures.

Where's the recovery?

While Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont came out denouncing the "alarmist talk" of a 1930s-style depression as "ridiculous" and defending his notorious remark that higher unemployment is "a price worth paying" for lower inflation, the Major government has been hit by an unending stream of bad economic news. The new Confederation of British Industry quarterly survey has declared Britain in deep recession, delivering what the *London Times* called a "coup de grace to the prospects for a post-election recovery." The CBI reported a new slump in industrial confidence, with manufacturers planning to cut output because of declining orders. CBI Director General Howard Davies accused the government of appearing powerless in the face of recession.

The government's handling of the economy was also severely criticized as leaders of Britain's hard-hit construction industry warned that a further 40,000 jobs could be lost by Christmas. Sir Brian Hill, the president of the Building Employers Confederation, said the construction industry had already lost 260,000 jobs since the middle of 1989 and added: "We are in favor of strong medicine to beat inflation, but it is no use if the patient dies in the process."

The Council of Mortgage Lenders has reported that more than 30,000 homes were repossessed during the first six months of this year. Prime Minister Major had claimed in January that home repossessions had been brought to an end.

Official trade figures for June show a widening trade deficit, with imports down for the second month in a row, while exports were shrinking even faster as overseas demand waned.

Government under attack

Against the background of a looming social explosion, Major is now facing concerted political and industrial pressure with Tory MPs joining the CBI attacks. Some are beginning to cast doubt over the future of Lamont and the prime minister, if they refuse to change policy and get interest rates down. John Carlisle, the right-wing MP for Luton North, said of Lamont: "If this particular doctor cannot cure the patient, then obviously he must go." And he added in a BBC radio interview: "I think the prime minister has got to take some drastic decisions, because I fear that his position itself may be under some threat if he doesn't do so."

Senior Tory MPs complain that Major has "boxed himself in" on interest rates and say that his party leadership could be at stake. "What happened to Margaret Thatcher could happen to him. And he has far fewer friends than she had," warned one moderate MP.