

Britain, anti-racist mobilization - Black Lives Matter: a New Left

Saturday 27 June 2020, by [Al-MAHDI Namaa](#), [DADONE Federica](#), [FAULKNER Neil](#) (Date first published: 17 June 2020).

It felt like 1968. It looked like the birth of a new mass movement of the oppressed. Neil Faulkner, Namaa Al-Mahdi, and Federica Dadone report back from the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in London and Cardiff.

Contents

- [Black Lives Matter in Cardiff](#)
- [White Rage and Race War \(...\)](#)
- [Confrontations with Fascists](#)
- [Black Power Reborn](#)

What has emerged are two possible worlds, which exist in opposition to one another. The first is characterised by inhumanity and oppression, racism and ecological catastrophe, economic depression and exploitation. The second is characterised by humanity and freedom, solidarity and socialism, human flourishing and liberation.

Black Lives Matter in Cardiff

On Saturday 6 June an estimated 2000 people gathered for the [second Black Lives Matter](#) movement in Bute Park (the first had been on 31 May in front the Castle) in Cardiff. It's worth noting that Cardiff is home to the oldest continuous Black community in the UK. It was a historic day, as it was one of the biggest demonstrations in the last decade. On the same day there were more than one hundred protests in the UK and the rest of the world.

BLM Cardiff - a collective of eight women and one non-binary person, all from mixed backgrounds - organised the protest. As in the rest of the UK, the movement mobilised in solidarity with the US Black Lives Matter rebellion after the murder of George Floyd, but was now clearly targeting structural racism in the UK too.

The organisers sent a clear message and took extra care regarding Covid-19; the crowd followed the rules. Protesters kept physical distance and pretty much everybody wore masks - there were also several people distributing masks for free at the entrance of the park.

The speakers who took the stage in the middle of Gorsedd Stone Circle sent a powerful, electrifying, vulnerable and truthful message, calling for the end of oppression of BAME communities in Wales and the rest of the UK. Young people shared their personal histories (and painful data on the disproportionate use of stop and search against BAME people). [1] They reflected that White Welsh people who believed Wales (and Cardiff especially) to be less prone to racism were silencing and burying the experiences of Black and non-Black people of colour.

Nelly, also known as Queen Niche, set the crowd on fire, and ended with a liberating call, 'Finally, no one is telling me not to shout!' Karen, of the Free Siyanda Campaign, spoke about Siyanda Mngaza, imprisoned after defending herself against attackers. The last three speakers were Hilary Brown, founding member of the National Black Youth Forum in Wales, former boxer Steve Robinson, and John Actie (one of the Cardiff Five – a horrifying miscarriage of justice). Actie explained how being accused of murder (he was completely innocent) changed his life forever. The families and members of the Cardiff Five are still waiting for justice. [2]

Before the end of the protest, the crowd kneeled for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Philandro Castille. And for Mark Duggan, Sheku Bayoh, Smiley Culture, Alton Manning, Joy Gardner, Cynthia Jarrett, Belly Mujinga, Christopher Kapessa and Shukri Abdi. 'These protests are just the beginning. We fight for British names as well. We will say their names,' said Selena Earney, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter Cardiff.

The day after, protestors in Bristol tore down the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in the centre of the city: BLM Cardiff on [Twitter](#) reminded people that there are a lot of statues of colonisers and slave masters that deserve to be torn down in Wales as well.

White Rage and Race War - London

The small gains made by the Black Lives Matter movement, since it re-emerged following the public police murder of George Floyd, enraged far-right leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (otherwise known as Tommy Robinson) to the point where he called his army of men to defend their war-time heroes. He expressed his rage on a Twitter message, widely shared on social media, openly condemning the BLM movement and setting his racists against anti-racists.

In response to Tommy Robinson, some BLM organisers called off the Saturday demo, demonstrating locally or on Friday. Meanwhile other BLM organisers, as well as Stand Up to Racism, London Black Revs and Mutiny, did not. Mutiny issued a Statement, ['No Retreat in the Face of Fascism'](#). The meeting point for the anti-racists was midday, around Hyde Park.

On Friday night, a group of young Black rappers, the Mandem, released a [video statement](#) calling for every driller, every hitter, every rider, every grinder to protect the people. They did this because they feared the cancellations were made at such short notice, many BLM activists would have missed the news, falling into the hands of fascist violence; their meeting point was 1pm Trafalgar Square.

Hyde Park Corner tube station was closed, so our Mutiny writer arrived at Green Park and walked. At Green Park station three police vans were stationed at the exit. Traffic was light and many sun revellers were in the park. At Speakers Corner near Marble Arch were almost 20 protestors, some holding or giving out branded placards; one had a home-made placard, which was getting all the attention: '#BLM One Race, Human Race #BLM'.

A small group of Rhodes Must Fall activists stood by the side of the meeting point. [3] Another larger group of men and one woman wore black T-shirts 'By All Means Necessary #JusticeforGeorgeFloyd, #BlackLivesMatter'. The announced meeting point was flooded with press, cameras and police; at one point they outnumbered the protestors three to one.

Even as more people joined, it was a small protest; a hundred people at most. Soon the demo marched, banner at the front and loud speakers roaring 'Whose Lives Matter' as the small crowd chanted back 'Black Lives Matter'. They stepped out of Hyde Park to Marble Arch. Murmurs around

the crowd communicated that Tommy Robinson's fascists had blocked Whitehall and Westminster Gardens.

One protester said that it was ridiculous for Tommy's racists to claim they protected statues; they had ignored many statues, and were there to start a race war. Footage later circulated around the small group of far-right counter-demonstrators, showing violent clashes between the fascist [Football Lads Alliance \(FLA\)](#) and the police in Whitehall.

The BLM organisers led the small crowd on taking a knee for George Floyd, followed by a series of 'Say his name: George Floyd' chants. Following short speeches by the organisers, the loud speaker was passed to a Rhodes Must Fall BLM organiser, who took over managing the platform.

One protester, a teacher, said that the government had hyped Covid-19 to drown its Brexit plans, which would be detrimental to their communities. Someone from Birmingham said, 'BLM have made so much progress in such a short time, the movement has to continue, we need to keep it alive, we are here to do that.' Their demands were clear:

We want equality, we want justice, we don't want police violence in our communities, or stop and search tactics that target us in particular. We want inclusion in both the political and social power in our society, we no longer want to be excluded economically by being denied jobs we are qualified for because of the colour of our skin or how our name sounds, and we won't accept the fact that our communities have to live in poverty or take on brain waste roles, because they won't be accepted at a job that matches their skills and qualifications.

By this point the sun was heating up. Back at Green Park station, helicopter chuffs were getting closer, police sirens with flashing lights were whooshing up and down Piccadilly. Our Mutiny writer decided to go to the BLM demo at Trafalgar Square. Back in the park, she met two young people carrying a homemade placard, '#BLM, Black Lives Matter'. Reporters for a major national newspaper joined this group. They had escaped a police kettle in Whitehall with their press passes, and said that the far right were fist-fighting and head-butting police, pelting mounted officers with glass bottles, cans and smoke canisters, some even throwing lit fireworks.

There was a thick wall of police between the far right and the BLM protestors and one reporter believed that most of the far right had been moved from Trafalgar Square. The reporter said he wanted to interview them, but having heard their racist chants and seen how violent they were, decided against it. His colleague added, 'We barely escaped; they were attacking the press too.'

He added that [green activists arrested by police](#) on Friday were members of an antifa organisation, the London Antifascist Assembly (LAF), and the reason the LAF had retracted their callout to activists to attend the BLM demo was because police warned them that they would be arrested as soon as they arrived.

Confrontations with Fascists

Three young men wearing durags, riding bikes, stopped and told the group to be careful, that a man had been bottled around the corner, that the police were getting heavy-handed and carrying out body searches on protestors. Six young men from Croydon, their first time at a demonstration, said they had heard about the BLM event on Instagram, and weren't aware it had been called off.

At the Mall, our Mutiny writer met a member of the Football Lads Alliance, heading the other way; he was in his late forties, wore an England team football shirt, his face burnt red, panting and out of

breath, and lifting his shoulders while he walked to get air into his lungs. He was in visible distress. Young BAME men on bikes circled us, warning: 'Violent fascist mobs are on their way and it's best if we stay out of the way.' Young women grabbed their handbags and purses, running scared towards St James Park, young men too, hurrying out of the way.

A heavy police presence thickened, appearing from a distance. At the roundabout at Buckingham Palace a large group, some wearing England's football shirts, some blue shirts, some shirtless, their bodies burnt, roared loudly, 'Ho 're ya', Ho, Ho Ho 're ya?' Followed by 'England, Woah England.' The group with our Mutiny writer were held in a loose kettle by police vans blocking the road while they moved the crowd of chanting hooligans into Green Park.

All the roads into and out of Westminster were blocked, except for Storey Gate where the group of BLM protesters were met by another group of men and teenage boys. They asked, 'Where're the Mandems? 'Have you seen them?' Westminster Gardens were also cordoned; there was no access to Trafalgar Square anywhere through Westminster; the only route led to Victoria Street where the fascists were congregated.

A lone, red-faced, fifty-something Football Lads Alliance member turned up and murmured something, giving the group the thumbs up. He wore an enamelled dark blue button badge, with gold letters saying 'FLA Football Lads Alliance'.

The group were on edge and one told him to fuck off. The man charged with his fist, when someone intervened to calm the situation. 'I only gave you the thumbs up, there was no need to tell me to "fuck off."' He added, 'We're not here to fight with Black people, we came for antifa and antifa are nowhere.' Another two joined him, both wearing the same FLA badge. One BLM protester said, 'What does your badge say? Aye? FLA! What does that mean? Fascists, racists, that's what it means, why are you even talking to us, we don't talk to racists.' Fists clenched again.

One protester spoke up:

They can't do nothing, because at the end of the day, when all this is over and done with, when they go home and come out on their balconies, with their neighbours, who are their neighbours? Black people. When they go shopping, to get their groceries, who will they see, who will be their shop assistants, their cashiers? Black people! You get me! When they go to seek medical help, who will they see, who will their doctors and nurses be? Again, Black people! If they need care, who will their carers be? Black people. At the end of the day, they can do nothing to Black people; we live with you side by side.

Amid a heavy police presence around Westminster Gardens and the Houses of Parliament and into Victoria Street, the crowds of FLA emerged, still raging but restricted to the right-hand side pavement while the BLM were on the left. The FLA kicked off with the police.

Large numbers of police pinned two FLA to the ground. Then they turned their attention to the Black youths. One protestor was cornered by the police and whipped by a truncheon, but escaped and ran by a line-up of police into Victoria Street.

The police shouted at BLM to 'just go' as the FLA got rowdier; more FLA seeped into Victoria Street. At Albert Street, a crowd of FLA sat on the pub benches. A White teenager, covering his face with a mask, threw an empty bottle towards the FLA: glass, plastic bottles and beer cans showered across

the street, some meeting in the air, crashing and falling halfway, spraying and spilling liquid with loud bangs. Some FLA men crossed over, coming after the boy.

Mutiny's writer intervened, shouting, 'He's a kid, can't you see that?' They froze, staggeringly drunk. One turned and said, 'But you did see him throw the bottle at us, it wasn't us.' The Mutiny writer replied, 'But we're not a 14-year-old boy.' The man was his late thirties/early forties.

One FLA said he had come from Peterborough to fight antifa, the 'real fascists', but ended up fighting the police. Another added that he came to fight the fascists, but ended up fighting with Black people. One man from Nottingham said, 'We ended fighting with police and the bastards beat us up.' Another showed his open wound. 'It's them in Westminster, they're the ones who reap the benefits; we get nothing, we're in this mess, together. We never intended to fight Black people. They wanted us to start a race war and here we are, right in the middle of it.'

Walking down Victoria Street, a glass bottle was hurled from above, missing the BLM group by a few yards. Younger FLA members on bikes, bottles in their tracksuit pockets, kept emerging from the side streets looking for lone victims.

One FLA member heading for the station turned to our Mutiny writer. 'Do you think we're bad for doing this? Do you think we're racists and bad people?' She replied, 'Doing what, sorry, what are you doing exactly?'

The man was in his late fifties. 'Protecting our heritage, our culture. How can we accept an attack on the war memorials on D-Day?' She answered, 'But don't you think we and the BLM demonstrators are part of this heritage, this culture, or is it just yours, and yours alone; what do you mean by "our"?'

He looked puzzled. 'But if your father fought in the war, Jerry here has fought in the war, his father has fought in the war, these monuments mean something to you.' Apparently Jerry was stationed in Northern Ireland during 'the Troubles'.

They repeated that they hadn't come to fight Black people, but antifa, the 'fascists'. The Mutiny writer responded was that she was antifa, because anti-fascism is not an organisation, but a stance against racism and fascism, and it was strange to defend dead, stone statues from living, breathing people who had clear demands about a common future, our common coexistence, that if the statues were there to commemorate a war against fascists, how could they pretend to be protecting them by fighting anti-fascists? The man tried to explain that antifa were the 'fascists'. The other said that he was a 'nationalist socialist' and believed in equality for all.

The current Covid-19 crisis has brought to the fore the value and necessity of BAME populations to the UK, its communities and way of life - the way of life the FLA pretend to be defending. While the FLA was predominately White, male, middle-aged and overweight, the BLM activists were multi-ethnic, young and fit.

So what were the FLA, DFLA or EDL fighting against? It seems they fight against their own future. Who wins when in a fight against the future?

Black Power Reborn

Sometimes nothing much happens in a year. Sometimes the world changes in weeks. These past weeks the world changed. It's too early to assess the scale or significance, but the world has

changed since four racist cops murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis in broad daylight.

They expected to get away with it. They usually do. The US police gun down Black Americans at the rate of almost one a day. Only this time, the youth, the oppressed, and the poor of America exploded in the biggest urban revolt since 1968.

That was surprising enough, and inspiring enough. What no-one could have imagined was that the movement would go global. But there we were. Several thousand, mainly Black and White youth, sitting in silence for eight minutes, fists raised in the Black Power salute, outside the Tory Home Office.

Because racism – police racism, state racism, backstreet racism – is an everyday experience in Britain, too, where the cops kill a Black Briton in custody roughly once a month. During the second big London protest, before the FLA mobilised, most of the Black Lives Matter demo stayed in or near Parliament Square. When our Mutiny writer got there, the youth had colonised the window ledges and balustrades of the Treasury, while another group, thousands strong, chanted ‘Boris Johnson is a racist’ outside Downing Street’s black gates.

No-one was ever all in the same place; it was fluid and anarchic, spilling out across the Westminster government complex, the cops in low profile, desperate to avoid it kicking off with such large numbers. Mutiny reckons there were at least 50,000, and there may have been 100,000. (It kicked off later, with violent mounted police charges in Whitehall, which is what often happens, the police taking their revenge once the main crowd disperse and they estimate the odds are in their favour.)

The anger was visceral. A sea of cardboard placards read ‘Racism is a Pandemic’, ‘The UK is Not Innocent’, ‘Silence is Racism’, ‘Fuck Racism’, ‘Fuck Killer Cops’. Chants of ‘No Justice, No Peace’, ‘Knowledge is Power’, and ‘This is Not Over’.

Our Mutiny writer sent a WhatsApp message to colleagues: ‘Left invisible’. He meant all the people worrying about Momentum elections in the Labour Party, the little sects selling pro-Brexit newspapers. For sure, that Left, the Old Left, was invisible. But later he realised that this was the real Left, the New Left, right before us all. Young Black British women led the demo outside the Home Office; they looked and sounded like the Black Panthers, but with a crucial difference.

The Civil Rights Movement and the ghetto riots in ‘68 after they murdered Martin Luther King had been mainly Black. The Black Panther Party had been restricted to Black members. A strong current of Black Nationalism and Separatism ran through the resistance. That was a weakness. History teaches us that the oppressed make the biggest advances when they unite struggles. When no-one fights alone, and everyone fights together – that’s when the left wins, when we knock the enemy back, when we make solid gains.

The reason is simple. The enemy is strong. In the States, we can see militarised police, National Guard, Regular Army, Secret Service, and armed fascist militia on the streets against an uprising of the oppressed. But we see Black, Latinx, and White youth fighting back side by side. And they have won a major victory: all four of the killer cops now face charges, and that means every racist cop in the US who wants to kill a Black man will think twice.

The same is true here in the UK. Black Lives Matter is led by Black youth, but they are leading a multi-racial social movement. The oppressed are organising and fighting back against the racism of the police and the Brexit Tories, but they are supported on the streets by tens of thousands of White youth.

This is the first mass social movement of the coronavirus era. We know that the economy is

collapsing into a new depression. We know we face a wave of redundancies, wage cuts, and evictions. We know that millions of young people especially face a bleak future.

We know, too, that the Tories will peddle nationalism, racism, and scapegoat politics, to divide people as the system goes down.

Banish despair. Banish resignation. This fortnight has shown we can change the world. A new, radical, militant Black Power movement has emerged. The oppressed, in the wake of the George Floyd murder, have taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers, and they have pulled unprecedented numbers of others into action alongside them in solidarity.

Dividing lines in the coming class war to decide the future of humanity and the planet have been drawn on the streets of Washington and London this June 2020.

Neil Faulkner, Namaa Al-Mahdi, and Federica Dadone in London and Cardiff

P.S.

- Mutiny. 17 June 2020:
<https://www.timetomutiny.org/post/black-lives-matter-a-new-left>

Footnotes

[1] Stop and search” is the power for British police officers to stop and search individuals “if an officer has reasonable grounds to believe that you have been involved in a crime, or think that you are in possession of a prohibited item.” [Release](#). BAME is an acronym for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, ie non-white.

[2] Five black and mixed-race men were convicted of murder and imprisoned, they were finally found innocent and the real murderer jailed. See [\[Wikipedia\]](#).

[3] The campaign to remove the statue of [Cecil Rhodes](#) from Oriel College, Oxford University, a leading British colonialist who gave his name to Rhodesia - now Zimbabwe, was finally succesful in a [vote of the governors](#) on 18 June 2020.