

LONDON'S



BURNING

After a week that shocked and shamed the UK at home and abroad, thoughts have now turned to the causes of such widespread unrest.

As Britain clears up towns and cities that have been affected by the worst public disorder in England since the eighties, David

Cameron declared that the riots were motivated by pure criminality. And it would seem that many Britons agreed with him, united in a no-nonsense public response. According to a recent ICM poll, 45% blame criminality on the part of the rioters. But observers from both ends of the political spectrum have refuted such a simplistic explanation and suggest much deeper roots.



GREED

Many believe that the UK has embraced a culture of entitlement, selfishness and greed that permeates all levels of society – a generation that have been brought up believing if someone else has got it, they have to have it. It's not hard to see that the rich and powerful seem as oblivious to morality as the robbers on the street. In recent years we've seen politicians jailed for fiddling expenses and corporate theft that continues unchecked, so is it that surprising that people adopt a 'me first' mentality? And yet the greed on display in England must have seemed incredible to those across the world who have much less.

The Daily Telegraph points to the hypocrisy of the British political class that have been so vocal in their condemnation of the rioters, highlighting the fact that one MP had notoriously (although legally) claimed £5,900 for eight laptops and another had submitted a claim for an £8,865 Bang & Olufsen television.

One accused rioter shouted at a judge, "I don't even get money for housing benefit."

CONSUMERISM

When one young rioter from Lewisham was asked by a Sky News correspondent why he'd been looting, he replied, "To provide for my family." Then asked what he'd stolen, "Tracksuits, electronic stuff, TV, iPads and trainers". Indeed, all the essentials of a society that's become obsessed with materialism and celebrity.

It's fair to say that consumerism, based on personal debt, has been pushed on society for years as a solution to a faltering economy. People have become valued for reasons of what they

Almost 25% of those initially charged in connection with the riots were aged under 18.

own, with acquisition of personal wealth the key to self-respect. Zoe Williams from the Guardian says, "This is what happens when people don't have anything, when they have their noses constantly rubbed in stuff they can't afford and they have no reason ever to believe that they will be able to afford it."

WELFARE DEPENDENCE

Under a new scheme, where petitions with more than 100,000 signatures can trigger a Commons debate, a new petition calling for thieves to lose their welfare hand-outs caused the government website to crash, unable to handle the volume of traffic. When the site was fixed, it quickly passed the 100,000 watershed required to qualify for Parliamentary debate. The e-petition reads, "Any

**"There's a real feeling that we'll be damned if we do and damned if we don't."
Paul McKeever, Chairman
Police Federation of
England & Wales**

Scotland Yard expects eventually to bring 3,000 people to justice in London, but given the number of forces involved around the country the final figure could be double.

persons convicted of criminal acts during the current London riots should have all financial benefits removed. No taxpayer should have to contribute to those who have destroyed property, stolen from their community and shown a disregard for the country that provides for them.”

FAMILY

The Independent says, “it should never have happened that parents, teachers, and the police themselves go in terror of the young, or in terror of the consequence of reining in their wildness.” Many believe that the rioters lack family role models and blame the breakdown of families and domestic life. According to the ICM poll, 28% of respondents cited a lack of respect within families and communities. One saddened mother on BBC’s Question Time said that British society had given young people “all the rights without and of the responsibilities.” She added, “I can’t even discipline my child. Children sue their parents these days.”

The Association of British Insurers has put the bill at an estimated £200m

SPENDING CUTS

Labour’s candidate for London Mayor, Ken Livingstone, was called misguided for linking the riots to government spending cuts. He told BBC’s Newsnight, “If you’re making massive cuts, there’s always the potential for this sort of revolt against that.” But many feel effects of the cuts haven’t been felt yet, perhaps a sign of worse to come.

POLICING

Much has been made of the police response to the rioting, with eyewitnesses complaining that officers appeared reluctant to do anything. Some cite a culture of political correctness and fall-out from criticism of the police during the G20 protests. Some commentators have suggested that arrests are a bureaucratic nightmare from a force scared of being sued for false imprisonment.

But despite the ferocity of the rioting and claims that the police mishandled the initial disorder, the ICM poll suggests that public trust in the police is uniformly strong, with 61% saying that they’re confident that the police enforce the law fairly, uniformly and without prejudice.

RACE

Only 1% of those polled blamed racial tension. David Lammy, MP for Tottenham insisted, “The polarization is not between black and white. It is between those who have a stake in society and those who do not.”

This would appear to be backed up by observations that in certain areas of London the rioters appeared predominantly black, whereas in Manchester the rioters were mostly white.

