

[The London Lootings need real solutions](#) [1]

Written by [Anton Howes](#) [2] | Tuesday 9 August 2011



Let's be clear. The riots engulfing London over the past few days are not politically motivated, and nor are they even protests. What may have started out as a reaction to the shooting of Mark Duggan has evolved into a mindless, thuggish reaction to the noticeable absence of law and order. A police state that spread itself so thinly in order to control every one of us has failed in its core duty of protecting the peaceful majority's lives and property from the shocking rapacity of a violent minority.

So who are the culprits? The vast majority of the looters appear to be very young, revelling in the havoc and destruction they cause rather than expressing anger and frustration. Some blame poverty and inequality, citing youth unemployment and cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance. This is of course an insult to every respectable poor person; those with the strength of character to get by and to better themselves without resorting to violence. If this is about poverty, it is poverty of spirit amongst a young few, rather than any widespread material poverty.

Diane Abbott, the MP for the affected Hackney North is probably much closer to the truth when she points out how these youths are destroying their own communities. Rather than venting frustration at figures of authority, they are actively destroying the livelihoods of their own neighbours. The poverty of spirit here is about alienation from the rest of society rather than purely the loss of respect for authority. After all, peacefully challenging authority is the healthy sign of a free and vibrant society, whereas relished violence towards your own neighbours is nothing more than sheer barbarism.

The knee-jerk reaction from many to use authoritarian measures has therefore also been disturbing. Calls to bring in the army, use water cannons and restore respect for authority do not address the problem. These young people are alienated by an impersonal, centralised welfare system that allows them to receive and take without any appeal or bond to the societies and communities immediately around them; so instilling a grudging respect for authority will only be temporary, and potentially perpetuate the problem when a deep-felt respect for all others is required instead.

Instead, the lasting solution must come from communities. Already, there are reports of groups of residents chasing away looters, and of Turkish communities in North London clashing with the thugs. Residents and shopkeepers have little choice but to rely on themselves and each other. Citizens therefore need to be made well aware of their rights in defending themselves and their property. The myth of neighbourhood policing has been shown up for the skin-deep and top-down sham it often is - but the answer is not to replace it with a more oppressive regime; it is to allow society to confidently step in so that law-abiding communities can themselves reclaim the city from fear.

Anton Howes is Director of the Liberty League.

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