Thousands of Anti-Racism Protesters Take to the Streets Across the United Kingdom to Counter Far-Right Rioters

Over the past several days in the United Kingdom, thousands of counter-protesters have gathered in cities across the country as a display of solidarity against violent far-right rioters. More than a dozen cities and towns had been plagued by bigoted violence during the preceding week as a result of a disinformation campaign that was hell-bent on creating havoc following a deadly knife attack on a children's dance class which was falsely blamed on an asylum seeker or immigrant – a social media-fueled rumor that was later debunked. The disinformation was intent on stoking anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiment, and prompted rioters to violently clash with police as they targeted mosques and hotels housing asylum seekers. Lists also began circulating on social media and messaging apps which showed more than 30 locations that might be targeted by the bigoted anti-immigration protests, with many of these being charities and companies that support asylum seekers and refugees. Many of the riots had been instigated by far-right Zionist groups and leaders that have received financial backing from foreign sources tied to the Israeli government, such as Tommy Robinson, the co-founder of the English Defence League (EDL) – a far-right Islamophobic organization. The EDL has ties to Zionist terrorist organizations, who have driven much of the violent Islamophobic thuggery in the United Kingdom in recent years.

In response to the wave of violent far-right rallies and riots, counter-protesters took to the streets to form human shields to protect asylum centers and demonstrate against the deplorable hatred. Some of the participants held signs saying things like "refugees welcome" and "smash fascism and racism," among others such as "unite against hate." Despite concerns regarding potential clashes between rioters and counter-protesters which saw nearly 6,000 officers brought in to tackle any possible violence and unrest, the gatherings were for the most part non-confrontational, and in the end, counter-protesters outnumbered those who were supporting the far-right led rallies. Furthermore, U.K. counterterrorism officials confirmed that they were in the midst of investigating some of the anti-immigrant violence which erupted after last week's knife attack. A couple of the incidents of interest involve an attempt to set fire to a mosque near the scene of where the deadly knife attack took place, in addition to an attempt to set fire to a hotel housing more than 200 asylum seekers this past weekend. U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer denounced the wave of far-right riots as "organized, violent thuggery" and warned that those taking part in the violence would "face the full force of the law."

What was clear to police, lawmakers, and experts involved in seeking to understand the course of events which transpired is that regrettably, bigoted disinformation and far-right agitators fueled the violence. On social media platforms, users shared false information about the deadly knife attack perpetrator which spread like wildfire among extremist groups and their supporters. This included lies about the attacker's name and immigration status, with people falsely claiming that he was an asylum seeker or that he had come to the United Kingdom illegally. All of this fanned the flames of narratives that oppose immigration. As disinformation about the attacker continued to spread, authorities issued statements saying that he was born in Cardiff, Wales; but nevertheless, false claims persisted and led to the outbreak of violence and rioting.

As a part of their efforts to negate the rioters, counter-protesters organized large-scale demonstrations aimed at outnumbering them – a tactic that worked in various cities and towns. Groups such as Stand Up to Racism called on citizens to mobilize in order to defend refugee charities, asylum support centers, places of worship, and

immigration law offices. Tens of thousands of people attended in solidarity in cities across the United Kingdom including London, Liverpool, Oxford, Newcastle, Brighton, and Southampton. Police spokespeople were quick to praise and thank many of the local communities for their role in standing united against the reprehensible violence. The counter-protests seemed to help in quelling the riots, as the overall situation has calmed in recent days.