

1 **Political risk and austerity**

2 original at

3 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/buttonwood>

4 There is something deeply disturbing about the idea that your own city is
5 out of control. There have been riots in London before but usually these
6 have been confined to a single area—Brixton and Tottenham in the 1980s.
7 The recent disturbances took place in multiple locations in London as well
8 as other big cities such as Birmingham and Liverpool.

9 The initial disturbance may have been provoked by an episode in which a
10 young black man was shot dead while a passenger in minicab. Then the
11 events seem to have been driven by the "buzz": the chance to rule the
12 streets for a brief moment and to enjoy the gains that flow from looting;
13 flat-screen TVs and alcohol.

14 One must therefore beware of pat explanations: if, as is suggested, some
15 of the rioters were communicating with each other by Blackberry
16 message, the idea that abject poverty was the root cause must be open to
17 doubt.

18 Nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask why people are doing this now and
19 not five years ago. The high level of youth unemployment (20% of those
20 aged 16 to 24 are out of work), the inequality of incomes and wealth and
21 the effect of local authority spending cuts on youth services are all factors
22 that might have contributed.

23 The much-heralded cuts have only just started: public spending is still
24 higher than it was a year ago. Yet there are already serious doubts about
25 the ability of the government to stick to austerity for another couple of
26 years.

Questions

- 1) What is, according to the text, the difference between the recent riots and the clashes of the 1980's?
- 2) Is the UK the only European country that has seen such riots?
- 3) How did the UK riots originate?
- 4) Try guessing the meaning of 'pat explanations' (line 14) from the context.
- 5) What was, according to the article, the role of poverty in the unrest? What arguments does the text make to back its assertions?
- 6) What are, according to the text, the political consequences of the riots? (Note that 'austerity' (strict economy) roughly equals to public spending cuts).
- 7) What is your opinion on the UK unrest? Can you imagine something similar happening in the Czech Republic?

Vocabulary

confine (line 6) – to enclose within bounds; limit or restrict

looting (line 12) – take by dishonesty, force, or stealth; pillage or plunder

abject (line 16) – utterly hopeless, miserable, humiliating, or wretched

root (line 16) – the essential, fundamental, or primary part or nature of something

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček:

