

CUT TO THE QUICK...

AS THOUSANDS TAKE TO THE STREETS OF LONDON AND MANCHESTER

Thousands of protesters ran the police ragged in a hyperactive day of protest at the latest national demonstration against fees and cuts in London on Saturday (29th).

Up to 10,000 people marched through the city towards Parliament Square, taking the route agreed with police. However, the crowd showed little interest in hanging around for speeches at the designated end point and most pushed on towards Milbank Towers – scene of the birth of the student protest movement in November (see SchNEWS 747). They were met by a boarded up Tory HQ and a thick line of police. For a short while tension bubbled as teenagers swarmed up the front steps and the crowd jostled the police lines while delivering a rousing chorus of “Tory scum”.

There was to be no repeat of November's ruckus though, and, as the crowd began to get jittery about the possibility of a kettle, shouts went up to head to the Egyptian embassy to show solidarity with protesters calling for the

end of Mubarak's regime (see SchNEWS 756).

The march then split into several large groups, most beginning the long (long) trek to the embassy. At the embassy a large, boisterous crowd gathered to hurl abuse at the autocratic Arab dictator, dance to a sound system and warm themselves by fires of swappie placards. Again police threatened to kettle, but the crowd stayed mobile and several splinter groups, each with hundreds of protesters, moved off in different directions.

Police attempts to follow the crowd were foiled by the blocking of vans and rapid dispersals and police were eventually reduced to wearily trailing behind as the crowds seized control of the roads. One group sprung a kettle on cop-cycles that were trying to follow them, surrounding three motorbikes and hurling smokebombs into the mix for good measure.

While one group returned to Parliament Square for a quick sit in, a number of others, several hundred strong, took to roving around

HIGH STREET TAX MANIACS - UNCUT!

UK Uncut's Big Society Revenue and Customs took on tax-dodgers in around 30 towns and cities around the country in a national day of action on Sunday (30th).

While yer working man/woman was sweating over their tax-returns, activists reminded the public of the £25 billion of tax that wealthy individuals and companies weasel their way out of every year by targeting Boots, Topshop and Vodafone with direct action and pickets.

In London, activists came under attack from a spray-happy copper, who doused 10 people with CS gas. Three needed hospital treatment. The attack came after police arrested a woman for criminal damage after she pushed a leaflet through the shop's closed door, slightly dislodging the rubber seal. As protesters surrounded the police shouting 'Shame on you' and 'Let her go' they were hosed down with the CS.

Before the attack, demonstrators had succeeded in getting Boots shut down with a group inside singing tax-themed ditties. Afterwards they moved on to shut down Vodafone, BHS and Topshop before heading back to Boots, where the trouble kicked off.

Around 50 people assembled for the Bristol tax-dodger tour. Protesters managed to shut down Vodafone several times, running back for another quick pop between visiting other targets. Topshop, Boots and BHS were also forced into shutting up shop, while HMV closed one of two doors.

In Brighton over 100 coppers were mobilised

to tackle plucky activists who were manhandled out of a Boots store before establishing a singing picket outside the store.

Other protests had mixed results. At some, only a handful of activists showed up to brave the cold and distribute information to passing shoppers.

Boots were the main targets for the day's action following their recent 'move' from their historic home of Nottingham to their chilly new base of Switzerland, home to not a single Boots store. Coming off the back of a private equity buy out, the move will see Boots' tax bill drop from 33% of their profits to a mere 3%.

Topshop was also top of the list of tax-dodgers as part of Arcadia, the Philip Green money spinning empire. Officially Arcadia, which includes brands such as Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, Burton, Miss Selfridge and BHS, is actually owned by Phil's wife. Lady of leisure Mrs Green resides in Monaco where she pays not a penny of income tax.

Also on UK Uncut's corporate hit list are supermarket behemoths Tesco and, of course, Vodafone, who kicked the whole thing off by worming their way out of a massive £6 billion tax bill (see SchNEWS 745).

UK Uncut's Dannie Wright said, "The government insists that drastic public spending cuts and a hike in VAT are essential, but they will hit the poor and vulnerable the hardest, while the richest dodge tax with virtual impunity."

*www.ukuncut.org.uk

SIR PHILIP GREEN BEMUSED BY PROTESTS



the consumer's paradise around Oxford Street. With energy levels kept high by sound systems and the Sounds of Resistance Samba band, the packs of protesters targeted tax-dodgers Vodafone, Topshop, Boots and Dorothy Perkins. Time and again stores around the city were forced to pull down the shutters and plead for police protection as the crowds descended, bawling "Pay your tax". Rapid police deployments prevented things getting too wild and the crowds quickly moved on, ever fearful of kettles.

With the huffing coppers reduced to trying keep pace with the antsy youth, protesters took control of the streets, bringing traffic grinding to a halt with their relentless marching and flying road blocks. All throughout the evening the cry of "Whose streets? Our streets!" rang loud and true.

AARON-EOUS

A simultaneous union/student organised demo in Manchester saw the final nail driven into the coffin of simpering politician wannabe, NUS President Aaron Porter.

After being collared by a group of protesters wanting answers for his utterly disgraceful lack of support for the student movement, Porter tried to make an escape. However, he was clocked by hundreds of fuming protesters who began yelling "Students, workers here us shout, Aaron Porter sold us out" and "Aaron Porter, we know you, you're a fucking Tory too" (the Daily Mail and the Torygraph reported this as anti-Semitic chants of "you're a Tory Jew"). Reports from those in the crowd and near Porter all fervently deny this and the reports seem to be entirely based on the almost certainly dickey hearing of one photographer.)

Witnesses reported that a "sobbing" Porter was then escorted away by police and private security. NUS vice-president Shane Chowan took Porter's place as a pre-march speaker and was promptly heckled throughout his speech before being pelted by assorted grocery items.

Around 4,000 people attended the Manchester protest. A group of about 500 broke away from the main march, forced their way through police lines and headed for the city centre. As the protesters marched through the city streets there were clashes with police, who tried to restore order through the time-tested methods of batons, horses and kettles. Eventually the breakaway groups were confined in kettles, from which they were released one by one after coppers forced them to give their details. There were 20 arrests.

While neither protest could match last year's action for numbers or all out action, they served a timely reminder that the movement ignited by the Tory/Lib attack on education is alive and kicking. With thousands of young folk now seasoned in protest tactics and with a healthy distrust of politicians and the police, the fight ain't over yet.

*www.anticuts.com

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

MUBARAK'S ATTACKS CAUSING CHAOS IN CAIRO

Protests in Egypt have taken a violent turn this week as Mubarak's heavies were sent out on to the streets to provoke peaceful demonstrators, giving the military no choice but to wade in. After a small crowd of Mubarak supporters managed to get into Tahrir Square, scenes of utter chaos ensued.

Pro-Mubarak demonstrators on camels and horses charged at the gathered crowds and volleys of stones quickly started to fly between the warring factions. Police and the army then had sufficient excuse to step in and attempt to separate the groups, using tear gas and rubber bullets. Violence in the capital Cairo has been escalating and continues as we go to press.

Until now, the resistance movement has seemed to emerge as a peaceful, non-hierarchical, grassroots campaign with no clear leadership or autocratic direction. The government supporters however have been suspiciously well-equipped with professionally sign painted banners, organised transport and ready for a fight. Reports have been made of people being ordered to demonstrate for Mubarak under threat of losing their wages, and Vodafone were apparently 'forced' to send out random pro-government propaganda texts.

This is the latest in a string of attempts by the troubled president to regain control, which have included imposing curfews, pulling the plug on internet and mobile phone networks, stopping public transport and appointing ex-Military Intelligence CIA-torture camp stooge Omar Suleiman to vice-president to oversee the strong-arm dirty tricks campaign.

DON'T MENTION THE WALL

There were turbulent confrontations between protesters and police in Berlin last week that led to 82 people arrested and 22 charges. Officially, 61 cops were injured in a mammoth police operation. Around 2,500 police officers, a helicopter and a water cannon were deployed on Wednesday (2nd) for the eviction of the 25 inhabitants of the infamous Liebig 14 squat.

One of the few remaining communes in the city, it was first squatted in 1990, just post the fall of the Berlin Wall. More than 2,000 protesters had gathered outside holding banners and shouting at police. In the following days things reached a climax. After officers from the German Special Force department charged in, protesters took to the streets of Friedrichshain and raised a storm. Caught in the wave of destruction were a department store, several banks and an O2 shop.

Green MP, Hans-Christian Strobele stated "alternative housing projects such as Liebig 14 were one of Berlin's trademarks and should be protected rather than destroyed. Even the district mayor, Franz Schulz, criticised the eviction. "It is not a good day. We're losing an important alternative project". The eviction is another step towards the urban gentrification of Berlin, that is pushing out all the low income bracket and working class households from certain areas.

POSITIVE SCHNEWS

After an 8 year struggle, three of the four defendants arrested during protests at the 2003 EU summit (Thessaloniki 4, see SchNEWS 755) have been found not guilty of all but one charge of "minor defiance of authority". One activist, Fernando Perez Gorraiz, was found not guilty of all charges.

"Minor defiance..." carries a 6 month max sentence, the least they could charge them with without looking too incompetent, as the defendants have already spent 6 months in the nick. One of the four remains in prison due to other charges.

While rolling coverage of the dissent in Egypt has been top of the agenda of all major news media over the last week, SchNEWS was hoping to get our own exclusive eye-witness account from an intrepid reporter who missioned out there to get a slice of the action earlier this week (in solidarity, not as a regime-change goal hanger).

However, having just stepped out of the airport, our man on the inside was instantly kidnapped by Egyptian police, who have seemingly been rounding up any foreign-looking types and journalists and detaining them - 'informally'.

Mainstream jouno's of many nationalities have been stopped, blocked or detained by plain clothes thugs, with suffering beatings and worse. With disinformed fear of foreigners spreading wildly, anyone too Western-looking is now a target, with eye-witness accounts all over the tweet-a-sphere. Thankfully our plucky wanderer has now been released and is 'relatively unharmed'.

The Egyptian Health Ministry reports 13 people dead and over 1300 injured, but who knows how close to the real figures these estimates are. The unrest shows no sign of stopping - by the time you read this all hell could well have broken loose with hundreds of thousands due out on the streets for Friday's protests, dubbed the 'Day of Departure' by the protesters. Mubarak and company's desperate ploy to cling on to power by stirring up chaos and bloodshed, before trying to ride in with the military to suppress it all means it does look like its all going to turn even uglier * See All Media

BEHIND THE IRONY CURTAIN

When the fine nation of Belarus was given the opportunity to express itself in the much hailed democratic function of 'free elections', there were unable to pull it off with the finesse of say, western governments. Alexander Lukashenko, often referred to as Europe's last dictator, was inaugurated for a fourth term as president in January 2011 after elections held on the 19th December 2010. Lukashenko has been president of Belarus since 1994. Using a whole load of cunning, with only the occasional resort to violence, and only slightly sponsored by Russian interests, he has managed to remain in power unchallenged.

Since about 2005, however, a few minor tiffs with the Russians and a bit of pesky EU interference, not to mention that darn internet, more voices of dissent are being heard and noticed. So a few protests here, a few arrests there and then, true to form, on the 19th Dec pole, with chutzpah George. W. could only dream of, Lukashenko polled an alleged 87.7%.

This announcement caused a lot of angry people to gather in central Minsk to express their disgust. This triggered the expected police reaction - as they so often do when faced with peaceful protesters worldwide - choosing to kick the shit out of everyone in sight. All usual dirty tricks ensued with 700 arrests and lots of good old-fashioned middle-of-the-night, break into house, bag over head and off to Siberia for 5-15 years we go malarkey. Relatives of those currently incarcerated are unable to contact their family and have no knowledge of where they are held, let alone what the evidence for their charges is. With the government threatening to even take the young children of those arrested into custody, solidarity for the Belarusian prisoners is much needed.

* To show support and find out more:
www.petitionbuzz.com/petitions/ffppob
www.charter97.org/en/news/2011/1/13/35188

ON THE HOOF

Last Sunday (30th) both the Forest of Dean and Grizedale Forest played host to groups of angry roamers determined to protect their woodland from the Great British sell-off.

Around 1500 mountain-bikers, horse-riders and environmentalists marched through Grizedale Forest in the Lake District with banners and placards, while the Right-to-Roam campaigners walked through the Forest of Dean.

If you had gone down to the Forest of Dean, you would have certainly been in for a big surprise as the march was populated with cross-dressers and people wearing animal masks and fancy-dress. The costumes aimed to recall an ancient tradition mentioned in Hardy's novels called Skimmington dress, symbolising the world going upside down and their disapproval of the sell-off.

Hands Off Our Forests (HOOF) have called for a national protest over the financialisation of the publicly owned land on the 26th February to ensure that those politicians are aware that a battle might have been lost but that the fight is not over.

* www.handsoffourforest.org

GROW TO LIKE IT

Good news for the Transition Heathrow action group, (see SchNEWS 737) whose community garden project has been given a new lease of life as the council have grudgingly delayed eviction for another 10 months.

Grow Heathrow, a guerilla gardening faction of the Transition group, restored the neglected site of an old plant nursery into a flourishing market garden, giving people in the Heathrow area the opportunity to develop more sustainable communities.

Despite putting the disused land back to use and creating a meeting space for local people, they were threatened with eviction in December 2010. However, court papers received on the 22nd January have revealed that the project won't have to appear in court until at least November this year.

* www.transitionheathrow.com

...and finally...

Jan 26th was a day in the life of surreal achievements for pop culture as Liverpool Hope university announced it had awarded its first ever MA in Beatle studies. Fab Four Fan Mary-Lu Zahalan-Kennedy is the proud recipient and she's now one of a select elite group who know more about the influence of the mop tops and their popular Merseybeat sound on defining 'identities, culture and society', than, er, normal people.

Mary Lu (we'd like to think) said, "I Want to Tell You it was easy but I had to work Eight Days a Week and spend many a long Hard Day's Night on my studies. I couldn't have done it without the Help! of my tutors, who would always say We Can Work it Out. When I started out on this Long and Winding Road, Like Dreamers Do, I was Nowhere Man, but now I've got this Revolution-ary qualification, I'm Free as a Bird - With a Little Help from My Friends, It'll be a Ticket to Ride around the media spouting forth academic waffle about Sergeant Pepper for years. Then when I'm Sixty-Four I hope to become a Paperback Writer. You Know My Name (Look Up The Number) - I am the Walrus."

Beat combo experts we may not be, but SchNEWS isn't worried - we've got a Doctor of Disco and a Professor of Punk...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS advises all readers, if you're in da Nile, watch yer Mubarak. Honest.

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email mail@schnews.org.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk