



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER AT THE COALITION FACE...

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 23rd September 2011

Free/Donation

Issue 789



FLYING THE FLAG

AS BANNER-DROP PROTESTER JAILED DURING LIB-DEM CONFERENCE

For dropping a banner off a bridge outside the this week's Libdem conference, one protester is now serving 10 days on remand at HMP Birmingham. Ed Bauer and two fellow activists from the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCARC) unfurled a banner with the straight and to the point message: "Traitors Not Welcome: Hate Nick Clegg Love NCAFC".

The three were nicked immediately afterwards on the flimsy pretext that "debris fell into Broad Street creating a hazard to pedestrians and motorists". The worst they and their mates expected was to be nicked and maybe spend the night in the cells. Instead, after all spent a weekend in custody, Ed was singled out and sent straight to prison by the district judge.

Because Ed is also awaiting trial for the Fortnam and Mason occupation (although not breaking any bail conditions), the judge said that he could not be satisfied that he would not commit further offenses, obviously reckoning him a protester needing to be made an example of. An act which would under normal circumstances would maybe attract an on the spot fine has become the pretext for detention with-

out trial.

Michael Chessum of the NCAFC and National Union of Students National Executive Committee said, "It is appalling that students taking part in peaceful protest are being victimised in this way. It is ludicrous that anyone would be remanded in custody for a minor traffic charge – and it's clear that the behaviour of the police and the court is an attempt to intimidate and muzzle protests against the Liberal Democrats' betrayal of education. Whether it's kettles, intimidation, or tactical charges – it is becoming increasingly difficult for students and young people to say that they have a meaningful right to protest."

Friends and supporters have been totally shocked by the courts' decision. But, post riots, this has become the norm. Unfurling a banner is exactly the sort of right enshrined in the Human Rights Act, plain old freedom of expression without any intention to disrupt, let alone damage or steal. And it was Nick Clegg the arch-traitor himself who was banging on about the importance of the human rights act during his boring conference speech, while Ed languishes behind bars for trying to exercise that

right to criticise the Liberal Democrats.

And Ed, in fact, was only doing what he had been elected to do as Vice President of Education for Birmingham University's Guild of Students (a posh name for their Student Union). As fellow protester Alice Swift explains, "He was elected on the back of promising to be a campaigning Vice President of Education and to actively fight against the unfair and unnecessary rise in tuition fees. Students like me voted for Ed to have a voice in the debate surrounding the attack on our education and it would be a disgrace if University management were to sack an elected student representative. I would be distraught to see him sacked and I know so many more students would be too."

A solidarity group has been formed on Facebook- Banner Drops Are Not A Crime, and Twitter #BannerNotACrime. Their spokesperson said this to ScNEWS,

"The district judge felt that it is the place of the courts to prevent people from engaging in criticism of their own government by locking them up, before trial. It is a disgusting attack on civil liberties, the right to free speech and peaceful protest."

A solidarity demo for Ed and his co-defendants will be held outside Birmingham Magistrates Court, where they are due to appear in back this coming Monday the 26th between 3 and 6pm, on Commercial Street.

EGYPT: SHEIKHING THE SYSTEM

AS PROTESTERS PUSH BACK AGAINST THE SCAF

Egyptian workers are staging the biggest wave of strikes in years, challenging a military regime that's finding it hard to retire gracefully. Since the beginning of September, more than half a million have defied an anti-strike law passed in April by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Postal workers were among the first to strike this month, soon joined by weavers, teachers, and nurses; then train drivers, doctors, oil workers, civil servants and even some of the Sheikhs affiliated with Egypt's historic Al-Azhar, centre of Sunni Islam, who perform the call to prayer at mosques. Demanding a decent minimum wage – promised but not delivered by SCAF – the strikes are being staged by many of the 120 or so independent unions that have sprung up since January's unfinished revolution.

In getting better at organising themselves, Egyptian workers are also challenging the corrupt economy that's developed since the 1970s. Under Presidents Sadat and then Mubarak, the military dished out land, contracts, commercial licences and privatised businesses to their mates, while the police kept workers quiet with

threats of violence. Companies, and the workers' official unions, were filled with regime-alièd placemen, on swish salaries.

Getting rid of those corrupt officials - the "mini-Mubaraks" in each workplace - is now one of the key aims of the striking workers. Teachers have been striking across Egypt since Saturday [17th], demanding the Education Minister – regime crony Ahmed Gamal Eddin Moussa – be sacked. Police tried and failed that day to break up strikes at a number of schools.

Since February, over 7,000 civilians have been summarily convicted in military trials, which the regime justifies by the question-begging presumption that they're dealing only with "thugs". Meanwhile, they're getting paranoid about independent media, clamping down on Al Jazeera and other satellite stations.

It remains illegal to criticize the military, which owns a third of Egypt's economy, with its budget a state secret. In February, the military promised to revoke the Emergency Law, which for thirty years has let the police bang up and torture whom they please.. Now, they're using the recent outbreak of exuberance at the Israeli em-

bassy [see SchNEWS 788] – which it's widely speculated the SCAF deliberately let happen - as a pretext to make the law more severe.

Meanwhile, many in the revolutionary groups see a looming "new establishment" born of a tacit alliance between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood's new Freedom and Justice Party, which many expect to do well in the upcoming elections. The Brothers opposed the regime mainly where it's suited them strategically – e.g., over the timing of the elections – while refusing to take part in Tahrir protests.

But it's not all going SCAF's way. To coincide with a big protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square on the 9th, they bussed in thousands of workers to Cairo stadium for a diversionary "workers' day" celebration – 'Exactly as Mubarak used to do', as one activist observed. But the gambit backfired, as hundreds of farmers gathered outside the stadium to demand that corrupt officials be sacked and state-run agricultural co-ops, dissolved.

The current strikes have seen workers abandon the official trade union which the regime used to prevent strikes, and are building on the unprecedented strike wave of 2007. "Before [the revolution], the only events where we had tens of thousands of people protesting were workers' protests", says Nadeem Mansur, director of the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, which has been helping facilitate rank-and-file union organizing. "Tahrir took inspiration from the workers... And [now] the other way around."

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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TOO LATE TO DALE OUT

Last Monday, activists and Dale Farm supporters steeled themselves for the long-awaited eviction – over 200 activists had gathered to lock on and support the 500 strong traveller community. But the law rather surprisingly rode to the rescue at the last moment – with an injunction granted by Mr Justice Edwards-Stuart to halt the eviction until at least Friday 23rd.

The injunction was granted on the basis that Basildon council had failed to specify exactly what was and wasn't permitted on each pitch. Thankfully for vulnerable residents the injunction also stops them cutting off the water and leccy.

The slow trundling of caravans back onto Dale Farm after the last-ditch injunction granted on Monday must have been like a horrible nightmare for Basildon Councilors, with everything they've been working to destroy slowly going into reverse. With reports that council officials don't appear to know their arse from their elbow, let alone a legitimate structure from a sledgehammer target, collecting the info necessary could be quite a struggle for the authorities.

SchNEWS lacks the clairvoyance to tell the outcome of the case, but with the council running up costs of £1.2 million for every day the eviction looms, and the trump card of politicians 'saving face' against human rights arguments, it's likely the eviction will go ahead. * See <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com/>

GLUE-ME RETAIL OUTLOOK

The nine UK Uncut activists who superglued themselves to Topshop last December will be either sentenced or acquitted today following a two-week trial at Brighton Magistrates Court (see SchNEWS 788). The trial has been a mix of technical arguments about what constitutes damage and evidence from expert witnesses on multi-billion pound tax avoidance and spending cuts.

The 9-day trial is reputed to be costing in the region of £100,000 (just slightly more than the £3,700 claimed by Topshop as the cost of replacing damaged mannequins. But then Topshop's owners Arcadia Group are a billion dollar company and the police and CPS have fallen over themselves to defend their interests, and sod the cost to the taxpayer.

One defendant said: "That was what the protest was about. The extent to which our whole society revolves around large corporations and their interests, to the exclusion of all other considerations. Corporate profits must be propped up with bailouts and tax loopholes however badly they screw up and however many ordinary people must suffer."

She continued, "Despite the fact massive corporations have only really come to dominate our society over the last 150 years, no one seems now able to imagine a world without them. We should let them fail and move on, to a world centred around real people not fictional entities."

Meanwhile in a parallel universe, in last week's Telegraph, Arcadia's top dummy, Philip Green, blamed the entirety of the UK riots on the activists.

DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS

As the Palestinian Authority prepares to go before the UN Security Council in a bid for statehood (see SchNEWS 786) Jewish settlers across the West Bank have embarked on a wave of attacks aiming to 'show Palestinians whose land it is'. Violence has been particularly brutal in villages around Nablus, with Awarta, Iraq Burin and Asira al-Qibliya all coming under fire.

In Asira, settlers from the colony of Yitzhak stormed the village on Tuesday 20th September, damaging property and assaulting Palestinians. Unsurprisingly when the IDF arrived on the scene it was Palestinians defending their village from intruders who felt the brunt of Israeli soldiers. A 13-year-old boy was hit in the back at close range by a high-velocity tear gas canister, and at least three people were injured by rubber bullets.

At Hawwara checkpoint just outside Nablus settlers from Itamar threw stones at passing Palestinian cars, as did settlers gathered in the Palestinian town of Ya'bad near Jenin and the northern entrance to Ramallah. In a metaphor reflecting the barrier the colonies represent to peace settlers also burned around 400 olive trees on the outskirts of Qalqilya. In response a coalition of Palestinian and international activists this week launched 'Refusing to Die in Silence', a group dedicated to recording and monitoring settler violence in the Occupied Territories.

The attacks came as Barack Obama readied himself for a UN speech in which he reiterated the right of Israel to defend itself and the need for direct negotiations between the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu and the puppet-regime of Mahmoud Abbas. Obama made no mention of settlements - and the fact that Israel's foreign minister lives in one - or the barbaric treatment of Palestinians.

* See www.schnews.org for a longer article, including news of how settlers are training dogs to attack Palestinians

SPARKS FLY

Rank and file electricians took action in protest against an industry wide pay-cut on Wednesday. The action took place on a building site near Farringdon station in East London which is part of the Thameslink upgrade project.

Hundreds of electricians, accompanied by a sound system, surged onto the site, scuffling with security guards on the way.

The protest – organised at a grass-roots level without union backing comes as several major construction companies attempt to backtrack on agreed wages for skilled electricians. The "Big 8" of construction employers, including the likes of Balfour Beatty and want to withdraw from the JIB (Joint Industry Board) agreement on pay, grading and seniority. They want to bring in new grades of semi skilled electricians earning £10.50 and £14 an hour instead of the current hourly JIB rate of £16.25.

According to worthy lefty publication the Commune (<http://thecommmune.co.uk>) the grass-roots organising is being run by an elected strike committee calling themselves "The Sparks". The Sparks' strategy to this point has been to remain within Unite, and yet organise their own parallel rank-and-file protests and actions, through an elected strike committee.

Further actions are promised - The next protest in London will be next Wednesday, 6.30 am, at Kings Cross station for the Crossrail project.

PARTY & PROTEST

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

RIP: TROY ANTHONY DAVIS

Troy Anthony Davis was executed in the early hours of Thursday 22nd at a prison in Butts County, Georgia (No, not an appropriate time to look for a cheap laugh about 'Butts County'). This was despite more than a million people (including the Pope, former US Pres. Jimmy Carter, former FBI Director William Sessions and Archbishop Desmond Tutu) signing a petition against the state-sanctioned murder.

On 18th August 1989 two people were shot in Savannah, Georgia – one of whom (police officer Mark MacPhail) died. Several 'witnesses' identified Davis as the shooter and, on 23rd August, he handed himself in.

Despite no forensic evidence, no murder weapon and one of the witnesses admitting under cross-examination that he only identified Davis because of police threats made to him, Davis was found guilty and sentenced to death in August 1991.

Davis continued to maintain his innocence; 7 of the 9 witnesses who testified against him changed their story or recanted, and jurors who found Davis guilty publicly said they now think he was innocent. Over the past 20 years numerous appeals were denied, mostly in attempts to save face: in the state of Georgia it is easier to execute a potentially innocent man than open a Pandora's box of police coercion, inadequate defence funding and a biased judiciary.

On the day of Troy Davis's death, the prosecutor in his case said of the situation, "all of it is exquisitely unfair" – unfortunately he was referring to the media attention on his work, not the legal stitch up that robbed Davis of his life.

Troy himself was more magnanimous; to the last he maintained his innocence, imploring MacPhail's family to "look deeper into this case so that you really can finally see the truth." His final words were he saved for his executioners asking "may God bless your souls." Amen.

...and finally...

The 7 billionth human to come kicking and screaming into the world is due before the end of this year. Whilst a shocking stat when you consider there were only around 3 billion in 1960, it seems we have now reached "peak child".

Although in the world's poorest countries (Afghanistan, most of Africa etc) populations are booming and women still average 6 kids each, globally the number of children being born each year has stabilised. In virtually all of Europe and North America, and most of Latin America, and Asia (a list including China, Thailand, Iran, Tunisia and Brazil), fertility rates are down to less than two sprogs per woman - therefore not high enough to replace the parents.

Earth's parasitical infestation will continue to grow for another few decades, however, because the new kids will be sharing space with billions of longer-lived old folks. It won't be until the next generation (around 2050) that the population will stabilise at 9 billion.

Short of the Rapture (or rising sea levels, or mass drought, nuclear war, Peak Oil, the next AIDS/H5N1 Flu-type epidemic or Asteroid hit) there isn't really much that will change this; so expect Peak Human sometime in the next few decades...

Hard though, not to be galled when considering the scale of tragedy involved if conditions or events force the return of World population to pre-industrial revolution levels (1bn), post-bubonic plague levels (350m), pre-agricultural levels (1m) or ice-age levels (15,000). Gulp.

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