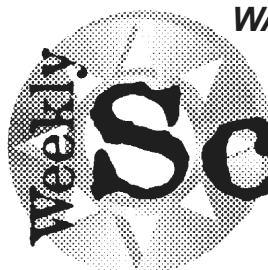


WAKE UP!! IT'S YER NEW YEAR SAME OLD...



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CSI PALESTINE

AS SCHEWS ANALYSES THE USE OF CS GAS BY ISRAELI FORCES

The tragic death of an unarmed woman in Palestine has led to a global cry for action against the increasing use of 'non-violent' weapons in the continued repression of the Palestinian people.

Jawaher Abu Rahma died after inhaling the supposed 'non-lethal' fumes of a CS gas canister, a substance which has been banned in the UK since 1964 due its capacity to kill hours after inhalation. Last Friday (1st) she was part of the weekly protest in Bil'in, a village which has become the leading symbol of resistance against the Israeli Occupation. According to Jawaher's mother Subhiyeh who was with her at the time, "We weren't even very close to them and the soldiers fired tear gas at us... Jawaher told me that her chest hurt and she couldn't breathe. Then she fell down and started vomiting."

There are numerous inconsistencies between the reports of eyewitnesses and the 'official' line on her death. Claims made by the authorities range from stating Abu Rahma had leukemia and died at home after leaving hospital, to saying she may not have even been at the demonstration. Army sources have also claimed that gas was fired only after the crowd started throwing stones and acting aggressively. All of these statements have been disputed by Abu Rahma's friends, relatives and the ambulance staff who took her to hospital.

AT THE CRIME SCENE

Around 1,000 Palestinians, Israelis and foreigners were demonstrating in Bil'in that day against Israel's construction of a wall through village land, separating residents from their livelihoods in a violation of international law. The community has been fighting an ongoing campaign against the building of the barrier, dubbed the apartheid wall (see SchNEWS 544) on their land, separating them from the olive groves that villagers have tended for generations. They succeeded in making the Israeli army announce they would re-route the wall in February 2010, and their actions and public statements have been used as the foundation for communities fighting the Israeli state-led injustices around the world.

Following Abu Rahma's death on Saturday (2nd), a hastily organised demo took place that evening in Tel Aviv, attended by over 200 mourners and activists. Outside the Ministry of Defence, the protesters blocked traffic on one of the city's main highways,

chanting slogans and holding pictures of Abu Rahma. Police charged the crowd and began to violently arrest demonstrators, carrying off a total of eight people, including a member of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. The remaining protesters held up traffic for a further 90 minutes, sitting down in the road, before moving to the police station where the arrestees were being held.

On the same night, a group of around 25 activists journeyed to the American ambassador's home in Tel Aviv to return discarded tear gas canisters. It is an American arms manufacturer, Combined Systems Inc. (CSI), who produces and supplies the long-range canisters to the Israeli forces. Marching through the ambassador's neighbourhood chanting slogans and talking with passersby, they congregated outside the residence to return canisters collected from Bil'in.

Five were arrested and detained, and have since been charged with illegal demonstration and resisting arrest. Shortly after the arrests, the authorities claimed that some of the canisters were 'live', and charged the protesters were with attacking the US ambassador's home. The action was one of the first by Israeli activists to be directed at a foreign government's involvement in the conflict.

WORKING HOMICIDE

The type of gas canister which proved fatal for Jawaher Abu Rahm has killed at least two others since 2009. An 18 month-old toddler choked to death after a canister was fired into his home while he slept, and in a tragic twist of fate, Jawaher Abu Rahma's younger brother, Basem, was killed in April 2009 after being shot in the chest by one of the projectiles (See SchNEWS 673). Hundreds of others have been injured, including US activist Tristan Anderson who was left severely brain damaged after being hit with a canister in March 2009 (See SchNEWS 669). Another US activist, Emily Henochowicz, lost an eye after being hit in the face in a demonstration following the attack of the Gaza flotilla in November 2010, and in the same month a young Palestinian had to have reconstructive surgery on his leg after the bone was shattered by a canister launched by Israeli troops. There are countless reports of the armed forces aiming directly at people in crowds, rather than using them to simply encourage crowd dispersal.

The extended range canisters are shot from



a rifle and are designed to break through barriers and release gas on contact with the ground. They are equipped with a propeller to send them over 400 metres through the air and have no gas trail when launched, making them extremely difficult for protesters to spot before they hit. Following the injury of Tristan Anderson, the Israeli Defence Forces banned the use of the projectile, a decision which was revoked just a few months later after police on a training exercise complained that being forced to use the shorter-range canisters placed them at risk from demonstrators throwing stones.

LAB RESULTS NEGATIVE

The CSI canisters are part of an increasing arsenal of 'non-lethal' or 'less-lethal' weapons which are being used against peaceful, unarmed demonstrators in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. Other weapons include rubber bullets which have been lethal in a number of cases and 'skunk water', a foul smelling liquid comprised of an unknown cocktail of chemicals that can be sprayed over a large area and last for weeks, making entire villages uninhabitable. The use of the Palestinian people as guinea pigs for a whole host of new forms of violent attack has been globally condemned. In a repeated cycle of the war machine, new weapons are developed, sold to Israel, trialled in the 'testing grounds' of Gaza and the West Bank, and then mercilessly deployed in war zones across the planet.

A call out for action has been made to target CSI and also BAE Systems, who manufacture tear gas candles through a division of their company, USA-based Defense Technologies. *www.palsolidarity.org

READING AND RIOTING

The Tory scum and their treacherous Lib Dem lackeys have already voted on their plans to jack up the cost of attending university, and now stage two in their plans to brutalise the education system is about to pass. On January 11th, Parliament will vote on scrapping Education Maintenance Allowances – support payments made to help the poorest with the costs of education. But as with the fees, the young and the angry aren't ready to quit just yet. Mass school and college walk-outs followed by a demo is what's planned for London and activists are encouraging people around the country to follow suit.

* For more information or help email againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com or ring 07775 763 750 or see emacampaign.org.uk for campaign materials.

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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IN POD WE TRUST

High-speed chases and confrontations as the Sea Shepherd fleet and Japanese whaling vessels clashed in the Southern Ocean last week.

While most of us spent New Year's Eve looking for the next watering hole, the three vessels of the Sea Shepherd society were engaged in oceanic clashes with three harpoon ships of the Japanese whaling fleet. "What an awesome way to begin the New Year", said Captain Locky MacLean of the *Gojira*. This is the first time Sea Shepherd have managed to zero in on the whalers before they managed to kill a single whale. "The fact is that these three killer ships are not killing whales while clashing with us."

Saturday (1st) saw the opposing vessels almost collide as they sailed at full tilt whilst trying to dodge floating slabs of solid ice in treacherous waters. At the same time the whalers aimed their turbo water cannons at the Sea Shepherd crew who responded with volleys of stink bombs. Since the discovery of the Japanese fleet a week ago, over 1,200 miles have been covered in the frontier waters adjacent to Antarctica. There have been no injuries.

On Wednesday (5th) evening, the whalers attempted to charge the *Gojira* whilst she was stationary in order to receive supplies. But the attack was anticipated and the Steve Irwin intercepted the whaling harpoon by deploying a Delta boat in its path. The Delta then pursued the fleeing whalers for 11 miles back to port, bombarding them with dozens of stink bombs before returning to base.

Cables released by Wikileaks on January 1st revealed that the Japanese Government regards the Sea Shepherd as a major threat to their criminal whaling business. The cables indicate Japan hopes to compel the US to crack down on the Sea Shepherd by stripping it of charity / tax exemption status.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is confident the fleet can be kept on the run. The whaling harpoon vessels are no faster than the *Gojira* and with the aerial aid of helicopter *Nancy Burnet*, the anti-whalers should be well equipped to keep the Japanese fleet within their sights for the duration of their whaling season, which normally ends in late March (to relive the high-octane drama of last season, start at SchNEWS 713).

* See www.seashepherd.org

BOLIVIA: LOSING THE MORALES HIGHGROUND

When the government of Evo Morales declared its Christmas present to the Bolivian people would be a 70-80% leap in fuel prices, the public's furious response made him glad he had kept the receipt.

The backlash began when a strike by bus and taxi drivers set to have their livelihoods savaged by the price hike brought La Paz shuddering to a halt. The counter movement gathered pace as demonstrators took to the streets in La Paz and El Alto, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Potosi and Oruro. The protests quickly turned raucous as fuming demonstrators showered police and government buildings with stones and erected burning barricades. In the clashes that followed, 15 coppers were injured as police tried to clear the streets with tear gas.

Morales and chums' plan was to put an end to the fuel subsidies which put a 6 year freeze on prices in the poverty wracked country. The government claimed that not only did the subsidies cost them \$380 billion a year but also that every year \$150 billion worth of fuel was smuggled out of the country and flogged in neighbouring countries where prices are much higher. However, the measures would have had a disastrous impact on the millions of Bolivians living below or around the poverty line as transport and food costs were set to rocket. The announcement of the plan had an immediate impact with runs on supermarkets and banks.

With more strikes and protests on their way and unions and social movements about to wade in, Morales addressed the people - many of them the same feisty bunch that set him on his way to power in the first place. There was no condemnation of a violent minority or strikers holding the country to ransom and no 'we're in it together' economic-necessity rhetoric. Instead, Morales announced "We have decided to obey the people" and revoked the law. Whether the sudden change of heart was down to a Road to Damascus epiphany of the damage the measures would cause, or fear of being run out of town like so many of his neo-liberal predecessors, the U-turn chalked up another victory for people power in the gutsy Andean nation.

GETTING OFF SOOT FREE

Environmental campaigners escaped prison this week after the judge in the case of the Ratcliffe protesters (see SchNEWS 752) ruled out custodial sentences. Following one of the UK's largest pre-emptive arrest operations last April (see SchNEWS 672), twenty activists received sentences ranging from 90 days conditional discharge to 90 hours community service for the charge of aggravated trespass. Two more are due to be sentenced later this month.

Good news also for two of the blockaders who targeted Sizewell nuclear power plant last February. Their case was thrown out of court on Wednesday (5th) after the CPS failed to produce any evidence for the charge of 'failing to leave land after an order had been given by a senior police officer'. Apparently a 'computer error' had led to the wrong charge being entered against the two campaigners and after the judge refused to let the CPS change their mind mid-trial the two defendants walked free.

HOLLOWAY HOOTANANNY

Migrant rights activists threw a New Year's Eve bash with a difference when they assembled outside Holloway Prison for a bangin', rattlin' and whistlin' demo in solidarity with the Yarl's Wood three. Denise McNeil, Sheree Wilson and Aminata Camara were among the approximately 70 women who went on hunger strike at Yarl's Wood detention centre last February (see SchNEWS 726) in protest against their treatment at the hands of the immigration authorities. The strike lasted over five weeks during which time many of the detainees were banged up in Holloway. The three have been there ever since. Over 100 people equipped with an array of noise making equipment turned out to demand the immediate release of the three.

* The three women are scheduled to have bail hearings in the coming weeks. To find out how you can show your support, contact freedenisenow@gmail.com.

...and finally...

On Dec 29th, a 23-year-old man from South Carolina became a late contender for Casualty of Their Own Stupidity 2010. He was run down by an SUV after running headlong across a busy freeway...while attempting to play real life 'Frogger'. It seems he and his mates had been discussing the classic 80's coin op video game where you attempt to hop your frog across increasingly busy roads in order to make it to the relative safety of a thin cyan-pixelled strip - or, river (presumably to spawn and live a happy life fat on bonus points) - and he thought, yeah, why not? Shouted, "Go" and dashed out in front of the oncoming traffic. To be instantly splatted by an SUV - a shame, given they wouldn't have featured in the original game.

And, sadly, he didn't go to the trouble of obtaining an actual frog suit which would have been much funnier. Still, we've all spent time running around nightclubs trying to recreate Pac-Man and we never bothered to wear a big yellow spherical suit. (Smiley-face T-shirts don't count.)

The man was taken to hospital where his condition was described as 'stable', although he just keeps saying they should take him back to the road cos he's still got two lives left.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS challenges all readers, come down the office and we'll show you our Street Fighter 2 moves. Honest.

LEAN DEAN FIGHTING MACHINE

The Forest of Dean is under imminent threat as once again the Government proposes to put it on the market. The Public Bodies Bill, a far-reaching piece of legislation already in the House of Lords will enable the sale of Forestry Commission land.

Over 3,000 people mobilised on Monday (3rd) to express their dissent and vow to protect one of Britain's most ancient woodlands and largest oak forest. The crowds marched, belted out songs and burned an effigy of Big Ben to illustrate their view of Westminster. A petition with more than 110,000 signatures is in circulation against the coalition's future plans for the Forestry Commission.

The Forest of Dean is one of thirty crown forests that are scheduled to be emancipated from the Forestry Commission's evil clutches and delivered into the loving arms of power hungry, profit-seeking developers.

According to the Government, the plan is to both cut the overall number of public bodies and make year-on-year savings of £1bn by reducing the cost of 'bureaucracy'. Unfortunately its not just gonna be paper cuts this time round. Large chunks of the 650,000 acre Forestry Commission land may be sold to real estate developers and construction companies that will limit access to the forest and hack down as many trees as possible.

Check the website for HOOF (Hands Off Our Forest) campaign for more information on preventing the forest sell off and updates.

* See www.handsoffourforest.org

PARTY & PROTEST

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

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