

M26: RITZ SPIRIT

SCHNEWS LOOKS FOR A REAL ALTERNATIVE AT LONDON MARCH

"HUNDREDS of anti-royal anarchists ran riot across central London yesterday, turning a peaceful demonstration about spending cuts into a class war" - Sunday Express

Well - somebody had to do it. The TUC's glad-hand fest was never going to change the ConDEMS course by even one degree. It was hijacked by anarchists and it deserved to be. The TUC mobilised its masses and did everything they could to make sure that genuine dissent didn't rear its ugly head. The emphasis was to be on a family-friendly day out without frightening the horses. Quite who they think is going to hand out prizes for niceness in the shark tank that is global capitalism remains a mystery.

The TUC's magnolia-tinted plan culminated in the endpoint rally in Hyde Park, where even moderate voices like Bob Crow of the RMT and Caroline Lucas MP of the Green Party were not allowed to speak. They were left out in favour of Ed Millaround the gormless puppet who's now trying to pass off the Labour Party as a revitalised radical alternative to the Tories - less than eleven months after they were run out of office. Is this then the TUCs strategy? Wait four years, and then vote in a business friendly Labour government - and they wonder why union membership is at an all time low.

While dressing himself up as the re-incarnation of Emily Pankhurst and Martin Luther King bearing Mandela's torch, Milliband junior was emphatic about Saturday's disorder, condemning it roundly while ignoring the fact that all the struggles he was paying homage to involved breaking more than a few windows.

SPLINTERS OF DISCONTENT

Earlier that morning, the feeder marches, all condemned as unauthorised by the TUC, made their way largely unhindered to greet the masses gathered at Embankment. A half-hearted attempt by cops to put a line across Westminster bridge in front of the Radical Workers block that had left from Kennington Park was shrugged aside.

The anarchist block split from the main march past Embankment Station, as a voice over a megaphone beckoned marchers to come with them for a sight-seeing tour around London. The break off bloc poured past Trafalgar Square, past the front of the TUC demo where hundreds of disenchanted activists decided to sack off the A to B marching exercise and join the black bloc. By the time the bloc had made its way through Covent Garden to Oxford Street it numbered several thousand.

Trudging along with the masses, other anarchists filtered through the crowd to UK Uncut's pre-arranged meet up on Oxford St at 2pm. UK Uncut had called for occupations of corporate tax dodgers. The police tactic for the day was clearly the protection of known UK Uncut targets, with lines of police in front of branches of Boots,

Vodafone and Topshop. The cops even seemed willing to protect Topshop at the expense of more traditional anti-capitalist targets leaving the way open for unfortified McDonalds and Starbucks to get done over anyway, showing that this was far from a single issue demo.

And that was where the fun really started - Topshop, one of UK Uncut's main targets, was the first to get it and then, for over hour and a half a rag-tag black block, numbering around a thousand, ran cops ragged around Soho and Piccadilly Circus. Selected corporate targets were attacked with smoke flares, paint and street furniture. Banks bore the brunt of the anger with branches of HSBC, Santander and Lloyds getting the paint and broken glass treatment. The HSBC in Cambridge Circus got given some special attention. As 'Smash the banks' was daubed across the window, the crowd began to move on, until, bearing in mind the complete absence of Old Bill, people decided to take the advice. Windows were smashed and a green wheelie bin was used to batter open the doors. The inside of the bank was turned over before activists did a runner as the plod turned. The F.I.T team were chased off in Cambridge Circus. Even London's Boris bikes scheme wasn't ignored, with activists peeling off the Barclay's stickers while leaving the machines intact. It might have been a touch violent but it wasn't mindless.

BRITISH SUMMERS TIME

At the Ann Summers shop, militant queer action emerged from the crowd, spray-painting Ann Summers shiny shop front and apparently taking a stand against "mainstream heteronormatively constructed sexuality", and finally putting a bin right through the window. - for some top post-situationist drivel - check out this communique <http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/03/476879.html>

(SchNEWS note - you're not actually allowed to issue a communique unless you've got an armed wing or have at least kidnapped the finance minister - otherwise it's just a press release)

Police coming into the area were harassed, with street signs and wheelie bins hurled under vehicles. Riot vans were liberally re-decorated. Some incredibly loud bangers or thunderflashes caused cops to flinch. Plumes of coloured smoke could be seen. Often groups of cops were rushing to protect targets that had been left by the fluid and swift-moving crowd. Uncontained, the block, waving red and black flags, moved along Piccadilly towards the Ritz. The chant went up - "The Ritz, the Ritz - we're gonna get rid of the Ritz" as tables smashed through the windows.

The block then re-united with the main march, giving many a chance to de-mask and slip away. Nearing Hyde Park, no doubt fearing an outburst of sentimental centre-left rhetoric, they split off back into Mayfair. Symbols of wealth, including a Porsche dealership and several overpriced



sports car were done, along with a couple of shops selling overwhelmingly priced status antiques. Every corner turned in Mayfair showed just how much grotesque wealth is still out there waiting to be redistributed.

UNCUT UNLEASHED

Meanwhile at 3.30pm on Oxford Circus, UK Uncut's second pre-arranged meet up was underway. At the convergence demonstrators were slipped a card that told them which colour flag to follow, with the aim of separating into branches then joining forces for the surprise occupation.

The target - Fortnum & Mason, was well chosen, grocers to the Queen and corporate tax dodgers. Unfortunately the sheer size of the protests meant the different crowds didn't arrive simultaneously and there was a stand-off with protestors inside the building and police lines forming outside. A push and shove ensued but due to the pavement barriers not enough of the crowd could get behind the push and the cops remained unbudged, blockading the entrances. The two to three hundred protesters who were already inside were left to soak up the atmosphere, and eye up bargains like the twenty quid jam and £65 napkin rings. Others took a more direct route and climbed up a street lamp onto the first floor. This was where the bulk of the day's arrests happened - 148 in total, even after cops promised to let them go. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tfk001SeH6A>

Unfortunately here, as during the rest of the day, there seemed to be more people filming than actually getting involved in any action. Anyone who wanted to get stuck in had to push their way through a line of happy snappers first. Where does all this footage end up? - Think before you get yer zoom lens out kids, 'cos careless shots cost lives.

The rest of the day was a mix of stand-offs and running skirmishes. The Peace Horse, a fabulous construction of hessian and bamboo was torched outside Oxford St tube. By this time the block was being pushed back onto Piccadilly circus as, freed of the obligation to police the TUC demo, that was safely in Hyde Park, more cops began arriving. Sealing off Fortnum & Mason they made numerous arrests.

A number of the crowd gathered in Trafalgar Sq, where some had suggested a 24 hr occupation. Described to SchNEWS by one eyewitness as "just a party, really", the cops seized their opportunity to wade in. A kettle was put in place and despite a fight being put up the crowd was dispersed or arrested by lam.

According to Green&Black Cross legal support there were over 200 arrests - and that's just those who've contacted the help-line. Most had their clothes and phones seized. Interestingly, they are receiving bail conditions to stay away from central London on the day of the next TUC mobilisation 1st of May and on the 29th April, the date of Kate&Wills happy nuptials.

If you were arrested then there's a defendants' meeting - Saturday 2nd April at 2pm - University of London Student Union, Malet Street, WC1E 7HY. Otherwise - see you on the streets!

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For trying to get to the birth of your first child...

A Hastings man was rushing back from work to be with his partner who'd just gone into labour. Cycling through the pedestrianised area he was accosted by a jobsworth PCSO who demanded his details - refusing and explaining the gravity of the situation our hero pedalled on. Minutes later he was boxed in on the seafront by two cop cars, who grabbed his attention somewhat more forcibly. Reluctantly handing over his details and explaining his urgent mission he thought he'd be let on his way. Unfortunately a man with the same name had recently absconded from a Glasgow courtroom - so it was handcuffs and then the cells, while shouting "I've never even been to f**king Glasgow". Luckily Strathclyde police informed Sussex plod that the wanted man was heavily tattooed and our un-inked friend was released just in time for the hospital dash- Mother and child are both well.

SHIMON THEN IF YOU THINK YOU'RE HARD ENOUGH

Israeli President Shimon Peres was forced to face his conscience as he arrived at Chatham House, London, during his UK visit on Wednesday (30th). A 100-strong crowd of Palestine Solidarity campaigners staged a noisy protest outside, demanding that Peres should be prosecuted as a war criminal. The Israeli premier was there to speak at an event with William Hague on "60 years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Britain" (which perhaps should have been titled "60 years of mutual blind eye-turning"?).

Peres' visit coincided with more news on the illegal settler takeover of Jerusalem and attempted ethnic cleansing in the Jordan Valley. The number of house demolitions in the West Bank have doubled since the beginning of the year, with the village of Silwan the most heavily targeted in recent weeks. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces have become heated in the area, with reports that soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets indiscriminately in the village on the 26th - a day after dawn raids saw 9 locals arrested. Children in Silwan have also been victim of a policy of Israeli police to target, arrest, detain and interrogate them.

Reports from the ground from Brighton activists in the Jordan Valley can be found at: <http://www.brightonpalestine.org/2011/>

CARLO GIULIANI VERDICT

On March 24th, the European Court of Human Rights absolved Italy of the death of activist Carlo Giuliani, who was killed during the 2001 anti-G8 protests in Genoa (See SchNEWS 314).

The family of Giuliani, who was shot in the face at point blank range by a Carabinieri, then driven over twice by the police Land Rover, have fought for justice during the years since his death. They claim the Italian authorities caused Carlo's death by using excessive use of force - and repeatedly took their case to appeal. However the ECHR dismissed the allegations, saying that the frenzied, deadly attacks were a legitimate act of "self-defence".

LOOSE ABOUT AUGHOOSE

Rosspport Solidarity activists were on hand to foil Shell's attempt to begin work on their on-shore pipeline at Aughose in Erris, County Mayo on Tuesday (29th).

With the climate criminals' lackies laying down road and putting up fencing to secure the site, activists began blockading the road by standing in front of arriving trucks. The seven activists were set upon by the Gardai, who even threw protesters into a ditch.

Not to be deterred, ten minutes later two protesters locked on outside the main gates. They too were attacked by Gardai, abetted by security thugs from IRMS.

Despite the violence undaunted activists continued with the blockades. On the road to Bangor Erris, eight people blocked trucks carrying equipment. The final action of the day came when a security guard tried to stop any blockade of the entrance by parking his vehicle in the gateway. However, one cheeky green turned the obstacle to his advantage by locking on underneath the vehicle, where he remained until morning, preventing the days work from getting underway. The action provoked yet another violent response, with 70 IRMS gorillas involved.

With the opening salvos fired in what is set to be a long battle, the Rosspport Solidarity crew are calling out for days of action against the project today (1st) and tomorrow (2nd).

* See www.rossportsolidaritycamp.org

BHOPAL SELECTA

Warren Anderson, ex-CEO of Union Carbide - the company responsible for the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster (see SchNEWS 238) - may be extradited to India to face charges for 'culpable homicide'. India's Central Bureau of Investigation were allowed to press for his extradition from the US by a Delhi Court last Wednesday (23rd). Anderson skipped bail in Bhopal in 1992, having been arrested days after the gas leak which killed up to 15,000 people and maimed thousands more in horrific circumstances. Now 90, Anderson has never faced charges for his role in the tragedy. Union Carbide knew its plant was based on untested technologies and didn't take any remedial steps even when they knew of the defects. The company, now owned by Dow Chemical, also failed to clean up the still-toxic area nor provide compensation to the thousands of people still suffering with the disaster's terrible legacy.

TOMLINSON INQUEST

The inquest into the police killing of Ian Tomlinson at the G20 protests (see SchNEWS 672) began on Tuesday (29th). The inquest has already heard how PC Harwood, the TSG officer who struck Tomlinson moments before he died, had been involved in a number of violent incidents beforehand. He was witnessed ramming one protester's head against a van and even dragging a press photographer to the ground. Meanwhile, the pathologist who initially stated Tomlinson had died of natural causes, Dr Freddy Patel, has been suspended from the medical register following his misconduct in a murder case. Although the inquest is investigating Tomlinson's death, it was already decided last July that charges would not be brought against Harwood (see SchNEWS 732).

LUCKY LUKASHENKO

Over 100 protesters gathered outside the London offices of communications company Grayling on Monday (28th), demanding a halt to the company's investment in Belarus until all political prisoners are freed. Hundreds of activists have been harassed by security forces and thrown in jail in Europe's last open dictatorship since last December (see SchNEWS 757). Last weekend a further 50 people in Belarus were arrested following a small rally against the 16-year rule of Alexander Lukashenko. Grayling PR is the second largest independent public relations consultancy in the world, and the only one of its kind with an office in Minsk. The company's CEO insists that it has never taken money from the Belarus dictatorship. The London protesters, who included relations of some of the imprisoned alongside Kevin Spacey, Jude Law and Tom Stoppard, maintain that any investment in a country running under an authoritarian regime feeds the reserves of its economy.

Spacey and Law became involved after making the acquaintance of The Free Belarus Theatre (FBT), a covert playing company that produces and performs underground plays under the radar of the state-owned Belarusian arts scene. Its members have been persecuted and further imprisoned for speaking out against the government. The protesters then marched to the House of Commons where FBT were to perform.

A modest sized demo of around 20 people, was held in Prague on Tuesday (29th) in solidarity with Belarusian political prisoners.

NUKING ON HEAVENS DOOR

Five US anti-nuclear activists have been sentenced to 6 to 15 months in prison, and one year supervised release. The unusual protesters, calling themselves Disarm Now Ploughshares, are all between 61 - 84. Two are Jesuit priests and one a Catholic nun. They had used bolt cutters to get into naval base Kitsap-Bangor, which houses the Trident submarine, to symbolically disarm the nukes inside. After getting to the nuclear storage facility they sprinkled blood and seeds before being arrested by security. Around 250 supporters rallied at the courthouse, breaking in to peace songs after the trial.

...and finally...

Deep in the heart of the Dorset countryside this July - it's a festival with a twist. No need to worry about licensing requirements or expensive security this time round, it's Bluelight - the police only festival. Despite being set up by the Police Federation as a relaxing three days for serving police officers, as well as the predictable dog team displays and formation motorcycling there will be a 24-hr dubstep stage (just how are they gonna stay awake? - better start stocking up on those legal highs officer). Headlining on Saturday night - the Levellers!. And you thought they couldn't sink any lower. Commenting on the event Police Federation spokesman Andy Parma told SchNEWS "It's a meet and greet - a chance for officers from around the country to hang and just chill". If you fancy yer chances of jumping the fence www.bluelightfestival.wordpress.com

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SchNEWS warns all readers, it's not just a bloc and white issue. Honest.

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