

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER LAST CHANCE TO SEIZE...

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SQUATTING ON HEAVEN'S DOOR AS TORIES THREATEN HALLOWED ANCIENT SQUATTING RIGHTS

As expected: Following the opportunistic yelps of a jumped-up tory media-whore (see SchNEWS 764), against the background of a right-wing ideological crusade, the criminalisation of squatting is now on parliament's agenda. This week the government announced a brief consultation period was under-way on the issue of occupation without authorisation. The sights of the Tory legislative blunderbuss are slowly being zeroed in, battle lines are being drawn and arguments rehearsed. As every day goes by, the corporate press prejudice people further against one of the few remaining laws that empowers the many against the few.

The squatting community and it's supporters have to fight their corner without the benefit of funds, media presence or political influence - they must work from the ground up and rely on the ability of people (and in this case, worryingly, politicians) to judge fairly

between logical arguments. Some squatters have already risen to the challenge - Squattastic is an irregular though frequent series of open meetings, held in a chain of different squatted properties, mainly in the London area to discuss ways in which this crack down can be combated.

In a more mainstream stylee - The SQUASH Campaign is a dedicated group of activists and researchers who have already given a briefing to Parliament attacking the proposed change to the law - this was presented on May the 18th and was attended and supported by several well-known groups involved with homelessness issues, including Crisis and Shelter. We are in the midst of a housing crisis in which rents are increasing, people are struggling to get mortgages and housing benefit is being slashed. This is gonna have a big knock-on effect on homelessness. Mean-



while, 870,000 homes lie empty and there's enough empty commercial property to create 420,000 new homes. Far from being a social menace - squatting is a positive short-term solution to homelessness, requiring initiative and responsibility. It's free of government cost and management. To make it illegal right now is both stupid and inhumane could at best be described as foolish, at worst inhumane.

The Tory proposals, whatever concrete form they take in law, will cost a packet to enforce. If you're kicked out of your squat repeatedly then unless yer a real die-hard then you're probably gonna end up on housing benefit. If even half of the government's conservative estimate of 20,000 squatters were receiving benefits for housing, the cost would be around £50 million a year. The policing and court costs that would result from a change in the law (involving general enforcement, evictions, prosecutions and human rights cases) would also hit the taxpayer in the pocket. Squatters currently cost the taxpayer nothing.

Yer ever suspicious SchNEWS detects an ulterior motive behind the government's plans, above and beyond protecting Mr&Mrs Semi-deatched while they're in the Algarve for a fortnight? The law already provides virtually instant eviction for squatters daft enough to crack a family home - this is provided by clauses allowing 'displaced residential occupiers' and 'protected intending occupiers' to force entry if their homes are occupied.

The new laws are of course designed to protect the commercial sector - and would of course have the effect of criminalising all protest camps. It seems that certain sections of the Conservative government are either blind or uncaring as to the harm that this pandering to business and property-owners will cause to the vulnerable in our society. Squatters won't be the only ones directly affected - SchNEWS gives it 24 hours after the law goes through before some dodgy landlord is using it to force through an illegal eviction with police assistance.

* For more info, see the SQUASH campaign's parliamentary briefing- www.squashcampaign.org/resources

** To get involved in the struggle against the Tory anti-squatting agenda, check out the next Squattastic - info available from their blog, <http://squattastic.blogspot.com>

FAIR AND SQUARE: R.I.P. BRIAN HAW

This week peace campaigner Brian Haw passed away after a year-long fight with lung cancer.

Chances are he'll be remembered for many years to come as an iconic figure in British life. He transformed himself into a fixture in both Parliament Square and public consciousness. His one-man protest began in July 2001, initially against the sanctions regime which was destroying life in Iraq. Then came 9/11 and the subsequent wars. Haw lived, slept, eulogised and shouted one helluva lot in his one-man peace camp for the last ten years of his life, all for the sake of child victims of war.

At the beginning he represented an outsider's take on UK foreign policy, ten years later and he was articulating mainstream wisdom; our leaders are crooks and liars who took us into an illegal and unjustifiable war with devastating consequences for millions.

His intransigence was a constant niggle to the authorities. Not many people can say they've had laws drafted purely to move them on, but Brian won that honour after the Parliament Square clauses of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 were passed. These failed hilariously when the courts ruled that as his protest had started

before the Act he was the only person in the world it didn't apply to.

Unable to pass the Brian Haw and Associated Matters Act 2006, the authorities were then forced to adopt more underhand means of getting him to move on, including dubious charges of obstructing the highway, a constant stream of arrests and police harassment. Not to mention fencing off of the entire grassy area of the Square. Westminster Council stooped as low as claiming that the placards had to be cleared away in case terrorists seized an opportunity to stash a bomb amongst the tatty cardboard.

The public unveiling of the Nelson Mandela statue in 2007 had the authorities getting themselves in a twist with that whole tricky democracy / totalitarianism thing: Ironically, Haw was fenced off and hassled to keep him out of the cameras (see SchNEWS 601).

Even though child victims of war remain, Haw's efforts became more than an anti-war and anti-sanction protest. He was making a statement about freedom of speech and assembly - one he won despite repeated and concerted efforts to get him moving on. For all the criticisms levelled at the guy, he understood one thing well: Irritating those in high places (and surrounding offices) isn't a crime, it's a tool. The Square's going to be quieter without him.

EDL: RUCK ON TOMMY

An attempted EDL attack on an anti-fascist benefit in Leeds was beaten off last Saturday. According to one eye-witness, "Around twenty of them tried to force their way through the door. They were forced back and soon legged it across the road where they had to resort to chucking bricks at the building." This was the latest in series of EDL attacks on anti-fascist and left wing events. The 'Rage against Racism' event was ambushed when only band members, bar staff and organisers were around. Cops arrived though and three of the invading group, identified as Bradford EDL, were nicked for their troubles. The gig, headlined by punk stalwarts the Oppressed, went ahead with a couple of boarded up windows. More R.A.R events are planned.

Across the country the EDL seem to be ramping up their efforts again with an attempt at multiple simultaneous demos across the country on July 9th - in Middlesbrough, Halifax, Derby, Cambridge and Plymouth. Previous regional demos have been characterised by low turn-outs as the rank and file only mobilise for the big ones. However they've also made threats to march through Tower Hamlets on 27th August. Previous attempts to do this have been abandoned as a 'suicide mission'. Anti-fascists have promised to oppose them at every turn.

Police responses to future demos could be interesting as, following EDL leader Tommy Robinson's arrest for public order offences, the EDL have decided to no longer cooperate with the police. Tommy's not taken too kindly to his bail conditions (not that any of them would so much as ruffle a hunt sab's feathers) and thrown his toys out the pram, stating: "there will no longer be any Police Liaison...at all levels".

* See www.uaf.org.uk and www.brightonan-tifascists.wordpress.com

WHAT'S THE PIG IDEA?

Planning is underway for a US-style intensive pig farm in Foston, Derbyshire. The massive development would house 2,500 adult and 25,000 growing pigs - with 1,000 being sent to slaughter on a weekly basis.

Incredulously, the company Midland Pig Producers are billing this hell-hole as a green energy solution, by incorporating a biomass plant to recycle 'retained gasses'. For a factory pig, even your farts can be commodified. They also claim 'there will be no significant impact on the fauna, flora, or water courses in the area as a result of this development' - a blatant gloss-over the fact that 30 acres of greenfield site will be bulldozed for the new factory.

Environmental and animal rights abuses notwithstanding, the introduction of intensive mega-farms in the UK is also a dark economic path. Able to operate on economies of scale, the mega farms will push many smaller farms out of business. Eventually the whole of Norfolk will have to be covered over and turned into a single mega-hyper-giga farm.

7,500 objections to the planning permission have been lodged so far. To send an objection or sign the petition see www.pig-business.co.uk

Wake up! Wake up! It's yer revolutionary
SchNEWS
Benefit Bash with...
RADICAL DANCE FACTION
(dub-ska legends)
and **The SPORADICS**
(punk-dub-ska)
+ **CAPTAIN OF THE RANT**
(spoken word)
Friday 22nd July 8pm £8
Hectors House
Grand Parade, Brighton
www.schnews.org.uk

NOT BACK TO IRAQ

A combination of courtroom and street level tactics saw a planned deportation flight to Iraq cancelled on Tuesday. This was to be the first mass deportation charter flight to Iraq. About 70 Iraqi refugees, mostly Kurds, were due to be forcibly flown on a specially chartered flight from an undisclosed airport at 11pm.

No Borders and refugee solidarity activists blockaded the Harmondsworth and Colnbrook immigration prisons, near Heathrow airport, to hold up transport onto the flight. Lying in the road with lock-ons, they held the blockade for around five hours. Meanwhile lawyers on behalf of the Immigration Advisory service succeeded in getting an injunction against the deportations - meaning the blockade was able to pack up at 9pm with no arrests.

* See www.noborders.org.uk

PARTY & PROTEST
For event listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

GREEK CHORUS OF DOOM?

Next Tuesday (28th) the perilous Greek parliament will vote on whether to impose new, even more savage EU-IMF austerity measures in return for being loaned the next €2bn instalment of a bailout agreed last year. If they don't, and the loans are withheld, they will default on loan payments in July, sparking economic chaos in European finance markets. If they do, more and more of the Greek public are likely to come out in open revolt (see SchNEWS 775, 771).

Greece are €350bn in debt. This is 150% of GDP - all the money they get in each year, before spending anything at all on government, the public sector, defence, law, health etc. etc. And they currently spend 110% of GDP on all that. This not only leaves them unable to make debt repayments, it means they need to borrow more just to stand still. And the debt mountain just keeps rising - and faster than any foreseeable future scenario could ever start paying it off.

A leading economist this week claimed just this, having run a model where Greece successfully imposed all austerity and enforced privatisation measures, and somehow managed to get 'highly optimistic' 3% growth (even the rich countries are predicting levels of less 2% anywhere in Europe). By 2015 their debt mountain will be near €400bn. Meanwhile in reality, all the public sector cuts and collapse of services are reducing the size of the economy and GDP, actually increasing the spiral of unserviceable debt.

This all means that without a different approach one thing is inevitable. Greece will default. But when?

Sooner will mean that the other Eurozone countries (mainly Germany and France) and will have to swallow up to €250bn of losses (Greek banks have around 25% of the debt) and deal with the political turmoil and fallout. Would contagion bring down Ireland, Portu-

gal or Spain? Would it push the Eurozone into recession, would the masses in all these countries start thinking 'if Greece, why not us...?'

Later and Eurozone countries will merely face ever larger losses and all the same problems as above.

But nonetheless the EU's major interests just can't seem to agree that major debt restructuring is the best bet forward, and seem paralysed into merely committing more and more of their taxpayers cash to loanshark bailouts that can never be repayed.

Whatever happens this coming week, Greece is a simmering pot ready to boil over - either financially or socially. Will the power elite find a radical way out of the crazy financial system death-slide in time?

How ironic if the 'birth place of democracy' is where the final downfall of the liberal democracy Euro-cartel begins. We for one will welcome abject poverty and our new Chinese overlords with humble gratitude and servility.

May EU live in interesting times...

...and finally...

If Europe's richest and most powerful can't find a solution to Greece's problems, perhaps they should take a leaf out of Greek Orthodox Bishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki's good book. He came out on TV this week with a plea for help from the Almighty. No not Barak Obama, but God himself.

His holiness read a specially penned 'debt relief prayer', including the lines: "Oh Lord, we confess that we have sinned as a state and as a people in the management of the economic and monetary benefits entrusted to us ... But no one is perfect and without sin on Earth ... We ask for Your mercy and request that you continue to support us." It is unclear when he expects the multi-billion cheques from heaven to start arriving.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, beware Greek bearer-bonds. Honest.

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