

CAMERON WAVES ARMS ABOUT IN MIDDLE EAST: ARMS FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR (TORN REGIONS)

As Egypt and its martial law swiftly falls down the mainstream rolling news agenda it has been replaced by even more dramatic events in Libya. While the Libyan people continue their life and death struggle against brutal dictator/deflated blow-up doll Ghaddafi, all these tottering dictatorships are causing a few awkward moments for the government and UK plc. On the one hand they like to throw out soundbites claiming how happy they are that these oppressed peoples are demanding the same freedoms and rights as we 'enjoy' over here, and their hopes for "an orderly transition" - on the other hand they have to remain extremely quiet about how 'we' have been supporting these same dictators for years, happily flogging them the arms they've used to enforce their reigns of terror while siphoning off their resources.

In fact, in recent years North Africa and the Middle East have been especially targeted as hot postcodes by European arms sellers looking for new custom. Its been boom time for companies shipping weaponry to the dictators in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco with sales quadrupling in the past five years, from Eur 375 to Eur 2bn last year. Ker-ching.

Britain has been keen to hustle its way to the front of the queue. In the past few months alone, the UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO) has been only too happy to approve the sale of weapons, tear gas and crowd control ammunition to both Libya and

Bahrain. The UK has been more than keen to flog Ghaddafi the tools of terror, making Libya a UKTI/DSO 'priority market country', with the government making 'high level political interventions' (presumably including releasing the Lockerbie bomber - who didn't actually do it but that's another story) all in support of arms sales and cosying up on the oil companies' behalf. There's nothing wrong with a dictator - as long as he's a dictator you can do a deal with.

Just last year Ghaddafi popped into British Harm Stores and ordered wall and door breaching projectile launchers, sniper rifles, crowd control ammunition, small arms ammunition (perhaps for the Eur 79m's worth of small arms supplied by Berlusconi in 2009?), tear gas and irritant ammunition. All handy when you want to crack down on any protest or resistance. The empty political rhetoric of an 'ethical' arms policy, and that weapons are "covered" by assurances that they "would not be used in human rights repression", would be laughable if it wasn't for an internet full of evidence of Gaddafi's violent repression.

Still, to an arms dealer, there's no such thing as a problem, only an opportunity. After a regime change, or during a bit of social turmoil, the 'market' gets a shake up. Some profitable old trade relationships might be blown, but new potential customers replace them - you've just got to get out there and meet 'em!

Cue David Cameron flying into Egypt, with the blood on the streets barely dry, to begin his



whistle stop tour of the troubled region. He was accompanied by top executives from the UK's arms companies - like intrusive coffin-salesman coming round when the 'deceased' hasn't actually quite kicked the bucket yet.

Whilst he did a nice PR job of popping into Kuwait to make an impassioned plea for his humanitarian desire to support its 'democracy' by selling it the weapons to protect itself (from local aggressors that we most likely also arm), the real reason for the trip was for a top level boost to UK arms companies attending this week's International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), Abu Dhabi.

The region's largest arms fair - where 10% of the exhibitors were Brits - was the perfect show-room to drum up new business and make a killing - never mind the embarrassment of what's actually happening on the streets, where the customers are busy making killings of their own.

For more establishment figures tut-tutting their concern for the people fighting these regimes, waffling about supporting freedom in the Middle East, see: the media. For more on the UK being up to its bloody neck in supporting repression the world over, see: www.caat.org.uk

* LSE students began a series of occupations on Tuesday (22nd) to protest ties between the University and the Libyan regime. So far, common rooms and the office of Director Howard Davies have been occupied. The University recently received £300k out of £1.5m awarded by the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation, presumably for having taken the Colonel's son Saif as a student. The occupiers are calling for the university to reject the remaining cash, revoke Saif's alumni status and award the unspent £300k on scholarships for Libyan students.

UKBA MINDS ITS PEASE FOR NEW SUSSEX DETENTION CENTRE

Planning permission has been granted to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to turn a special-needs school in Pease Pottage, Sussex, into a 'pre-departure accommodation facility' for families facing deportation.

The proposals for the centre are part of the ConDems new pilot scheme for deporting families, spun by the UKBA as "a new, compassionate approach to family removals", and heralded by Nick Clegg as "an enormous culture shift within our immigration system."

The new scheme involves three stages: Assisted Return, Required Return and Ensured Return, the idea being that the measures taken to force families to leave the country will become more drastic the further through the process the families are. Unsurprisingly, few families go voluntarily, and out of 96 cases, only three have so far been deported under the first two stages. The Home Office was, of course, rather disappointed with these results.

The greatest 'shift' we have seen so far is that the new system appears to have created a new market for detention and deportation profiteers. By the 'Ensured' stage, secure hostels, run by pri-

vate accommodation providers, are used to house families for up to a week before they are forced to leave the country.

In the case of Pease Pottage, an application was lodged on the 2nd February by the UKBA to convert Crawley Forest School, a residential school for children with behavioural and learning difficulties, into a deportation hostel. The proposed hostel will be the third such centre established within the last year, the other two are in London and Liverpool. The school is owned by Crossroads Childrens Education Services Ltd., a private company owned solely by its director Sunita Arora, the wife of Surinder Arora, the owner and founder of Arora International Hotels.

The case gets even murkier. According to Corporate Watch: "No open procurement tendering process for the facility, as required by EU and UK legislation, has taken place, which suggests that there may have been some dodgy, behind-closed-doors deal between the UKBA and the Arora Group." Eager to keep this controversial development out of the limelight, the Home Office sent a letter to Mid Sussex Council, asking them not to publish the application details due to 'sensitive information', a measure usually taken for military facilities.

The plans were eventually made public thanks to a leaked 'consultation letter' sent to locals by private consultation firm CgMs on behalf of the Home Office, the content of which tried to convince them of the new plans for Crawley Forest School. The 'consultation letter' was sent to residents by the Home Office, care of the private consultation firm CgMs Consulting. The school itself, which has been told to vacate the property by the 1st April, were unaware of the plans until they were contacted by campaigners. Around 35 locals attended the first public meeting concerning the facility, held in the neighbouring village of Pancross last Wednesday (16th). No Borders activist Ian Bros told SchNEWS: "The general feeling was that they were concerned about the value of their property and people possibly jumping over the fence - and about protesters outside. There were, however, some at the meeting who could see the wider picture and the need to end the detention of children and not fudge the whole thing with this 'detention-lite' centre."

* See corporatwatch.org.uk

ROUGH DIAMOND

Brighton's lippy young upstart of a radical newsletter, Rough Music, has been ruffling some feathers on SchNEWS' home patch. Since 2005, *Rough Music* has been sticking it to local profiteering parasites, thuggish cops and corrupt politicians. Now it appears their efforts have provoked a backlash as a shadowy figure is trying to shut the plucky pamphleteers down.

The first inkling of trouble came when *RM* received an email from Nominet – who regulate '.org.uk' domain names – demanding proof of identification for the registered owner of their website, one Mr ahem, Rough Music. Having misplaced the id of Mr Music, the domain name roughmusic.org.uk was left to die and the site moved to the new domain of 'roughmusic.org'.

But, like so many of the world's persecuted, *RM* was not to find peace and security in its new home. Soon, a new email dropped into the inbox from the regulators of their new domain, this time including the whole correspondence that led to the enquiry. *RM* was being pursued by one Tomas J Stehlik who was determined to get his hands on the personal details of the "illegal group" behind the monthly-ish newsletter – so that legal action could be taken by his clients.

Having traced Stehlik via his company Stehlik IT Services ("We take the SH out of IT"), *RM* rang up to try and trace the sinister figures lurking behind Stehlik. While Stehlik kept schtum on the identity of his client(s), his comments suggested the mystery foe was someone who has appeared in regular *RM* feature Wanker's Corner. "You would not use such language about your children even if they committed some not very nice things," the priggish Stehlik told *RM*.

A barely coherent, toothless, brew-stained spokesmunter for *RM* emerged out his k-hole long enough to mumble at SchNEWS, "We don't know who these moneybags scum are, but they won't keep us quiet. Whoever it is has picked a fight with the wrong Brighton-based scurrilous radical newsletter, the wankers."

RM is one of a gaggle of local newsletters, including the Worthing Pork Bolter, the Hereford Heckler and the Manchester Mule, plugging the gap left by a vapid excuse for a regional news industry. Unlike sycophantic advertorial packed local rags, these independent voices are willing to stand up to profit and power in a time when few else in the media will. And with more and more newspapers slashing costs by dumping local staff and even outsourcing production (see SchNEWS 748), they remain true local voices. And it is anonymity that lets them do it. Yes, it might not mesh with the wiki-era of transparency and freedom of information, but with Britain's ludicrous libel laws tailor-made to help the rich and powerful silence their critics, there is no other option. So, in solidarity with *RM*, SchNEWS would like to state for the record, the following people are grade-A wankers: Tomas J Stehlik, Mike Holland, Simon Fanshawe, Tony Mernagh, Steve Harmer Strange, and many more...

Check out the latest sizzling edition of *RM* for the whole story, a round-up of the suspects and more details of the shady habits of Tomas J Stehlik at: www.roughmusic.org

OFF THEIR LEEDS

Protesters occupied the council chamber at Leeds City Council on Wednesday (23rd), disrupting a meeting deciding the fate of local public services.

Around 50 protesters stormed the chamber mid-debate before staging a sit/lie in on the floor. The council's axe sharpening was held up for 90 minutes before resuming behind closed doors. They were debating the proposal to slash £90million from the council budget and chop 1,500 jobs.

LAST DAYS OF THE TAJ?

Anti-supermarket activist group SaboTaj was at Brighton County Court on Wednesday (23rd) defending their occupation of a vacated shop premises where Sainsbury's have put in a planning application (see SchNEWS 759).

The judge granted an IPO which was served within half an hour of the group leaving court. On the expected day of eviction, Thursday 24th, a group of around 60 occupiers and supporters set up outside the building with guitars and free food to keep the bailiffs at bay through peaceful protest and community spirit. A few coppers hung about during the day, and some shifty-looking types in suits turned up to make notes and take a few pictures of the building, but no eviction attempt was made.

With people still inside the building and occupiers on the roof, the fight is not over yet, and the campaigners plan to hold daily rallies outside until Sainsbury's get the message.

*See www.kemptown.wordpress.com or Facebook group: No More Supermarkets in Kemptown

BELGIUM: MIGRANTS REVOLT

Another week, another dramatic revolt against detention and deportation from the most mistreated sector of western society. Migrants imprisoned in Belgium's Steenokkerzeel 123 Bis detention centre rebelled on Sunday (20th), resulting in one wing of the building going up in flames, a rooftop occupation, and - for one - an opportunistic break for freedom. Some of the sans papiers even threatened to hang themselves with bedding from their cell windows.

Unrest in the centre had been brewing for several days prior to the revolt. Many detainees had been on hunger strike in protest against the treatment of an 18-year-old Egyptian man, who had been held in solitary confinement and beaten by guards. Solidarity group Voices Without Borders demonstrated outside the centre as it burned, while police shut down the whole local area. Most of the migrants have now been moved to other detention centres.

BRISTOL: A HUB OF ACTIVITY

A reclaimed homeless drop-in centre in Bristol is on eviction alert after seeing off a bailiff last week. On Friday (18th) morning, The goon tried to post papers and carry out a first inspection. Around 15 masked up squatters emerged from the heavily barricaded building and surrounded him, preventing him from posting the eviction notice. When the bailiff fled to his car he found himself unable to leave as the road had been barricaded with skips and bins and was slick with spilt petrol.

Three police vans, a helicopter and a fire engine soon arrived to clear the road and help the bailiff flee. A group saying they are "the empowered homeless" reopened "The Hub" in January, a month after it was closed due to budget cuts.

* For info or to help defend the Hub, contact Simon Clarke: tel 0718630361, email: thenewhub@yahoo.co.uk, syfly5@hotmail.co.uk

AIRY (UN)FAIRY

Six activists who formed a human chain around the wheel of a jet to protest against the expansion of Manchester Airport in May 2010 were found guilty of aggravated trespass on Tuesday (22nd). A host of climate change experts spoke for the defence during the two day trial. The relatively light sentences - court costs and a two year conditional discharges, and one case of 80 hours of community service - showed the judge's sympathy for the defendants' 'laudable motives'.

For more see www.manchesterairportontrial.org/

TIME TO BAIL

The great Bank Bail-in kicked off on Saturday (19th), when hundreds of UK Uncut activists set up impromptu libraries, mothers' breakfast clubs and stand-up comedy shows in over 35 Barclays bank branches around the country.

The Tottenham Court Road Branch of Barclays was taken over by a group of kids, parents and carers protesting cuts to play provision. The unruly mob played giant snakes and ladders and coloured in their own banners while enjoying a spot of breakfast.

The scene was repeated across the UK with peaceful sit-ins, reading groups and creches taking place in branches from Birmingham to Edinburgh. Marches and pickets against Barclays were also staged around the country including Brighton, Northampton and Sheffield.

The protests were part of UK Uncut's recently launched 'Big Society Bail-In', a plan to 'open up' the banks rather than shutting them down. Barclays were first on the hit list after their recent announcement of an enormous bonus pool of £3.4bn, with a personal bonus of £9m to go to CEO Bob "the time for remorse is over" Diamond.

On Saturday (26th), UK Uncut will be targeting RBS, just days after it revealed a bonus pool of £900m, news that coincided with the announcement that 50,000 NHS jobs are to be cut.

...and finally...

With the government's merciless cuts programme set to hit the quality of life of millions of households, you could be forgiven for thinking the ConDems didn't care about our happiness at all. Well, David Cameron is so keen to assure us our wellbeing is close to his heart he's starting a new programme to find out just how happy we are.

With a budget of £2million (how many NHS jobs?), the initiative will see four new questions added to the Office for National Statistics household survey. So, on a scale of 0-10:

How satisfied are you with your life? *Well Dave my sicks been withdrawn even though I can't move anything except my eyelids...but at least I'm not in Libya, so 3.*

How happy did you feel yesterday? *Not too hot, Dave, my landlord told me he is kicking me out to yuppify my house and charge sky-high rents but I can't challenge it as you've cut legal aid for housing. 2.*

How anxious did you feel yesterday? *The news is full of scary stuff and my son dropped out of college as he won't be getting EMA, so he's gonna sell crack on the street instead. 8.*

To what extent do you feel the things you do are worthwhile? *I have this nagging feeling Dave, that our society is set up to allow you and your mates to strap saddles on the backs of working people and ride them into the ground - and I'm just asking myself, why bother? 2.*

The first survey will go out to 200,000 people, apparently a large enough sample to iron out any 'bias' (like people answering while loved-up on disco biscuits or filling it in after the death of a beloved family pet). Apparently the optimum happiness level is seven or eight; you don't want to go over that as 'excessively' happy people are prone to be "gullible" and make "careless" decisions. SchNEWS' advice? Stay safe. Stay miserable.

* Stop the War (www.stopwar.org.uk) have called for a mass boycott of next month's national census which is being run on behalf of HM Gov by arms company, Lockheed Martin. How handy for them to hold an encyclopedic demographic database of everyone in Britain, even given the 'assurances' they won't ever take a peek. Honest.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, we wouldn't buy a second hand F-16 fighter jet from Dave. Honest.

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