

Scottish Socialist VOICE



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DIAMOND GEEZER?
Bob Diamond says he resigned to protect Barclays' 'reputation'

by Colin Fox

THE resignation of Barclays CEO Bob Diamond in the aftermath of the London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor) scandal was inevitable but remains insufficient.

Diamond epitomises the 'Masters of the Universe' arrogance prevalent in investment banking throughout the world.

This culture feeds off the fact that each day there is more money 'slushing' around the

world's finance houses in search of easy money than the aggregate of all the other trades multiplied by 100.

Consequently, financiers think they are untouchable, that they stand above the laws the rest of us must abide by.

Prisons across the world are full of people convicted of fraud but the cells seldom contain investment bankers despite the fact they have illegally deprived billions of people of unimaginable sums.

With this Libor scandal, the same bankers who took the biscuit for arrogance, greed and reckless incompetence in 2008 remind us that lying, cheating and stealing in the financial world simply have no match elsewhere.

These people relegate corrupt MPs and unscrupulous media hacks to the Blue Square Premier League of dishonesty and graft.

In wielding enormous sums of money on an hourly basis they are encouraged to break every

rule in the book and sneer at regulation as they do so. The Greek philosopher Anacharsis surely had them in mind when he wrote: "Laws are like cobwebs - strong enough to hold the weak but too weak to hold back the powerful."

Anyone who thinks Barclays' fraudulent manipulation of Libor - and they are not the only ones implicated - was the work of a few bad apple rogue traders acting on their own volition

• Continued on page 2

40,000 back Revenue and Customs strike

John Davidson of PCS Revenue and Customs GEC (personal capacity) looks at what happens next

OVER 40,000 members backed the strike in HMRC on 25 June, bringing the department to a virtual standstill. The mood amongst pickets is positive, we realise that the Tax Justice For All campaign won't be won or lost from one day of action but there is growing support for the long-term strategy required to force the employer to make real concessions on our demands.

We are entirely reasonable to call a halt to the job cuts in HMRC when bodies such as the National Audit Office and Parliamentary Accounts Committee lambast HMRC for failing to ad-

dress the £120billion tax a year that goes unpaid by big business and the super rich, recognising that only by properly resourcing us can we seriously pursue the likes of Vodafone and Goldman Sachs. We are currently consulting our branches on a strategy of further industrial action designed to maximise disruption to the department throughout the summer and will be looking to name the

days soon for further strike action should the department continue to refuse to negotiate.

HMRC were surprised at the level of support for the action and have subsequently hinted that they are willing to talk about privatisation - but only if we call off the action!

The Group Executive refuses to sell out the membership on the basis of vague talks - what we

want is a firm commitment that they won't be doing business with outfits such as Teleperformance and Sitel - paid £4million by HMRC for a 12-month 'trial' to steal our jobs - who pay their workers over £6000 less than Revenue staff, force them to work unpaid overtime and employ them on ridiculously short-term contracts of only six weeks.

We know that privatisation and departmental cuts are both parts of the ConDem's wider austerity agenda, and will also be building towards national action alongside PCS colleagues across the civil service and other public sector unions in the autumn, starting with the TUC demo on 20 October. We are confident that the U-turn coalition can be forced into further retreat both in HMRC and beyond.



PRESSURE: staff are ready for more action this summer

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

• *Continued from page 1*

should not be allowed out on their own. To suggest that Bob Diamond didn't realise what was going on in his division of the corporation is simply preposterous.

If it was true, and it clearly isn't, Diamond should have been sacked for incompetence. But as several of his staff have pointed out over the past few days - anonymously, as they fear company retribution - not only was he aware of the fraud, he oversaw it.

His resignation statement says he stood down from his highly lucrative post with immediate effect because he feared the scandal was "damaging the [Barclays] franchise". It is hardly a sign of his remorse and it remains to be seen just how lucrative his pay-off has been!

Reports suggest that around £1trillion is traded via Libor transactions on a daily basis so its corrupt manipulation means The City of London's reputation has been shot to hell. Whilst the £300million penalty handed down by the toothless Financial

Services Authority is chicken feed for Barclays, the industry expects further investigations to result in similar penalties for the other banks involved and greater regulatory reforms.

Politically the situation is white-hot too. When weaklings like Ed Miliband suggest Diamond should be sacked, significant change has occurred. And the truth is that the wider public, suffering the worst economic hardship in 80 years, is in no mood to

allow thieving on this scale to go unpunished any longer.

It demands Diamond and his equally culpable counterpart Stephen Hestor at RBS are held to account. Let's not forget that RBS last week earned the unprecedented condemnation of the Governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King for its failure to provide even basic current accounts operations after a "cataclysmic" IT failure left its 4.5million customers unable to access their monthly salaries.

Hestor and Diamond badly underestimated public hostility to-

wards them in merely offering to forego their multi-million pound annual bonus as an act of contrition. Their multi-million pound salaries should be taken off them too at least, if indeed they are not jailed.

Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath once described financiers like Diamond and Hestor as the "unacceptable face of capitalism". That was in the 1970s when they had nowhere near the economic power they do now.

But even then he was way short of the mark. The fact remains the banks believe they are too big to fail, and too big to jail.

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FASLANE BIRTHDAY BASH FOR THE HAPPY CAMPERS

by Carolina Perez

LAST month saw the 30th anniversary of the Faslane Peace Camp which was set up to protest against nuclear submarines on the Clyde. On 28 June, activists of SSP Campsie Branch alongside members of Acting Strange Theatre Company provided birthday greetings with an afternoon of performance, poetry and songs.

Satirical sketches like 'Lock-in', an analogy that demonstrates the political ties between Scotland and England, showed how crucial the forthcoming Independence referendum will be in terms of the future of nuclear missiles at the Faslane Naval Base.

Performers simulated a 'lock-in', (not the pub kind!) a technique used by seasoned protesters using a plastic tube to attach themselves together making it harder for police officers to cut them free and arrest them. The characters in this sketch represented both sides of the argument for staying in the union and for breaking away from the UK.

Dismissed

Another sketch, 'Balanced' took a tongue-in-cheek look at how news is broadcast and what is deemed as important news by the mainstream media. This piece, set in a TV, showed two newsreaders presenting a news bulletin dedicated almost entirely to Her Majesty as the nation celebrates her 60-year reign.

Stories like mass unemployment, conflict in the Middle East and anti-nuclear protests were cast aside and dismissed to bring us breaking news of what members of the Royal Family were wearing.

After a few songs and some poetry readings, the peace campers were congratulated for



WARHEADS ARE NOT BETTER THAN NONE: activists hand in a letter to staff at Faslane naval base last month

the action they have taken to make Scotland a nuclear-free zone and were presented with a vegan birthday cake.

What strikes you the most when you arrive at the peace camp is its beautiful surroundings. Never far away however, is a police presence that constantly monitors the daily activities of peace campers and their supporters.

Members of the Acting Strange Company were acutely aware of this since having a rehearsal raided by Strathclyde Police the previous week asking for personal details and what our intentions were.

Clearly, a handful of people sitting in community centre in Paisley reading scripts is a threat national security, but when it comes to weapons of mass destruction 20 miles outside Glasgow city centre, massive resources are spent to protect

the base from protesters. Shortly after the performances, the activists from Campsie Branch and a hoard of youngsters who have shown an interest in the campaign went to the North Gate of naval base to hand in a letter of protest which outlined their opposition to the nuclear warheads but also to provide assurances that in an independent, nuclear-free Scotland, they would fight for workers at the base to keep their jobs.

The action that was taken was a success in spite of the pouring rain and more action will be taken in the run-up to Hiroshima Day on 6 August.

• *Acting Strange are looking to stage a play for children in November and anyone who interested in being involved should get in touch via: [facebook.com/ActingStrangeTheatreCompanyScotland](https://www.facebook.com/ActingStrangeTheatreCompanyScotland)*

Coastguard unions demand halt to closures

COASTGUARD and seafarers unions PCS and RMT have demanded a halt to the UK government's planned cuts and closure programme to coastguard and maritime rescue centres.

The demand came as it emerged that one of the threatened rescue facilities, Clyde, is set to be closed in December with indications that no alternative capacity is due to come on stream until 2014 leaving the life-saving services with hopelessly inadequate cover for over a year.

PCS and RMT say that the whole botched Clyde coastguard closure plan, confirmed in a letter from the minister Mike Penning, shows that the nationwide reorganisation by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is simply a cuts-led exercise that will have devastating implications for safety at sea.

It also appears to go against a commitment Mr Penning gave to parliament in November that no centres would close "before the robustness of the system is demonstrated".

Dangerous

As well as Clyde, Forth is due to close in the autumn with Yarmouth believed to be next in line. Staffing numbers at Clyde have already been run down to dangerously low levels.

The MCA proposals would cut more than 140 jobs and close nine coastguard stations around the UK: Brixham, Clyde, Forth, Liverpool, Portland, Solent, Swansea, Thames, Yarmouth.

In addition, for the sake of £400,000 per year, the coalition government abolished the Maritime Incident Response Group which had valuable expertise and capability in fighting fires at sea, loading even more demand on the MRCCs.

SCOTLAND'S PENSIONERS: 'BETTER TOGETHER'?

GREEN PROTEST: Minister for Care Paul Burstow didn't care enough to show up to the Pensioners' Parliament, so he was replaced by a cabbage

by John McAllion

THIS year's Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool attracted more than a thousand pensioners from all over the UK. Organised by the National Pensioners' Convention (NPC), the Parliament is a sounding board for NPC policy makers on a wide range of issues relating to older people.

The "Parliament" met for three days in June. It met after the launch of the pro-independence campaign and before the launch of the anti-independence campaign. While Scottish independence did not feature, the substance of the Blackpool debates did offer valuable insights into whether older people in Scotland really would be safer and better off by remaining within Britain.

Differences

What quickly became clear was that older Scots do benefit from Scotland having its own parliament. The debate around free concessionary bus travel highlighted the differences between Scotland and England.

In the South it is limited to off-peak travel on weekdays with eligibility linked to rises in the state retirement age. By contrast, here

there are no travel limitations on the Scottish scheme which is available to all on reaching their 60th birthday.

Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, warned the Blackpool parliament that Westminster's attacks on public sector pensions, allied to crippling tuition fees and soaring student debt levels, meant that young teachers in England now faced a marginal tax rate of 50 per cent.

She feared that many of them would be forced to opt out of their public sector pension scheme.

With Westminster's planned rises in the state retirement age, she worried that an American type situation could develop in the South where workers could no longer afford to retire. She cited an 84-year-old teacher she had met in Massachusetts unable to retire because of financial pressures. The Scottish Parliament, of course, has already scrapped tuition fees and has made clear its opposition to Westminster's attacks on public sector pensions.

Dr Jacky Davis of the NHS Consultations Association spoke of an even graver threat. She warned that the Coalition Government's new Health and Social

Care Act was destroying the NHS in England. She knew of two GP practices in London that had been taken over by a private healthcare company after being put out to tender.

Profit

When it proved impossible to make a profit from the newly privatised businesses, the company simply closed one of the practices, leaving 4000 Londoners without a GP.

GP commissioning of health services was opening up the NHS in England to penetration by the private sector. Richard Branson's Virgin Care had now taken over the commissioning of healthcare services in Surrey.

As a private company, it was exempt from freedom of information and protection for whistle-blowers' legislation. Unlike a health authority, Virgin Care's Board met in private and was under no obligation to open up its proceedings to the public.

The sole responsibility of Foundation Trust hospitals in the south was to remain solvent. As competitive commissioning of services spread, financial pressures would force more and more Trusts to switch to private providers for low-cost, less

complex but more profitable procedures.

This would help to balance the books, but would leave the Trusts with even less money to spend on the more costly procedures relating to the more complex and chronic conditions characteristic among older people.

The situation was now so serious in the south, that the NPC was distributing campaign cards to its membership to be handed to their GPs. The cards ask that the patient not be referred to a private sector provider unless there is no alternative public sector provider.

Under the Act, of course, the GP or private commissioner is under no obligation to pay any attention to the NPC card.

Before the credit crunch and the collapse of public spending, a devolved Scottish Parliament had enough resources to protect older Scots from the worst of what is happening in England.

As Westminster funding is squeezed it will no longer be able to do so. Only a Parliament with full economic and political power could do that.

'Better Together' will increasingly ring hollow as the gales of spending cuts and privatisation begin to blow north as well as south of the border.

'No' camp dust down the scare stories...



ARE YOU SERIOUS, DARLING? Alistair Darling likened voting for independence to buying “a one-way ticket to send our children to a deeply uncertain destination...”

by Campbell Martin

JUST over 300 years ago, Scotland was sold into a political union with England.

The so-called ‘nobility’ of Scotland were paid handsomely for their treachery, while ordinary Scots rioted in the streets in opposition.

Robert Burns described the pro-union nobles as being “bought and sold for English gold, sic a parcel o’ rogues in a nation”. Today, another parcel o’ rogues is attempting to keep us in the British Union with a campaign partly funded by ‘English gold’.

Unprincipled

They call themselves the ‘Better Together’ campaign, but in reality they are an unprincipled coalition of British Unionists, committed to working together in an attempt to prevent Scotland from assuming the status of a normal, independent nation – so let’s just call them what they really are, the ‘No to Independence’ campaign.

The so-called ‘Scottish’ Labour Party has no qualms about jumping into bed with the Tories and their Lib Dem

lapdogs, nor from working in a campaign partly funded by Tory donors. Recently, a pro-union fundraiser was held at the Signet Library in Edinburgh, organised by the Essex-based United And Cecil Club, where tickets cost £150 each (£1,500 to sponsor a table) and the main speaker was right-wing Tory Education Secretary Michael Gove.

These are the people determined to keep control of Scotland, even when Scots reject them at the ballot box.

Only by retaking our political independence will Scots be able to create the situation where Tories can never again impose their will on Scotland, yet ‘Scottish’ Labour is working with the Tories to prevent us from having that power.

Labour, by their actions in the ‘No to Independence’ campaign, have made clear they would rather see the Tories continue to govern us from London, than allow Scots to elect our own government in an independent Scotland.

Even on their own website, the paucity of the pro-Union case is revealed for all to see.

Instead of a positive vision for Scotland within the British Union, the site pleads for help, with headings such as “Tell us why you think we are better together” and “Share your ideas for the campaign”.

Scare tactics

At the ‘No to Independence’ launch, the campaign’s ‘big hitter’, former Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling, was so bereft of anything positive to say about the British Union that he resorted to attempting to scare parents about their children’s future.

Honestly, this is what Darling said: “If we decide to leave the United Kingdom there is no way back. It is like asking us to buy a one-way ticket to send our children to a deeply uncertain destination.” Seriously!

So, apparently, we should stick with the certainty of Scotland governed by Unionists from London.

You know, the certainty of soaring unemployment, the certainty of cuts to desperately needed services, the certainty of increased areas of multiple deprivation, the certainty of children growing up in

poverty, the certainty of our elderly dying in winter because they can’t afford to put their heating on, and the certainty of young Scots being sent to kill or be killed in illegal, immoral, imperialist wars.

As for there being ‘no way back’ once we have voted to retake our independence: at a rough count, I make it 48 countries that have become independent from Britain – spanning the United States in 1776 to Brunei in 1984 - none of which have ever sought to give up their independence and find a ‘way back’.

After we have retaken our political independence, the social union between Scotland and England will continue, so don’t listen to the other nightmare scenarios painted by the increasingly desperate British Unionists: there will be no border guards at Gretna, we’ll still be able to watch *Coronation Street*, pensions and benefits will continue to be paid (usually through the same offices), Scots and English will still be able to work in each others countries.

There is nothing to fear from Scotland becoming a normal, independent country.

10 good reasons to vote Yes

AS the STUC opens its consultation on the 2014 referendum, SSP national workplace organiser **Richie Venton** gives some reasons for workers to vote YES... and fight for an independent socialist Scotland

1 For the first time in 300 years the Scottish people will have a say on whether they want full self government, like any other normal nation on the planet. With 630,000 members, plus their families, the STUC and the individual trade unions need to take a clear stance and campaign for it.

The trade union movement boasts of its record in defending democracy, at home and abroad. Surely one of the most fundamental democratic rights is the right to self-determination? And Scottish labour movement pioneer **Keir Hardie** boldly declared 'Home Rule' as his first and foremost demand in elections over a century ago.

2 Unless progressive, pro-worker, pro-public services forces set the pace and stamp their mark on the Referendum debate, rival camps of reactionary ideas will dominate the debate, with the aid of the millionaire-dominated media.

Various unionist parties that defend the capitalist system of exploitation and inequality to the hilt on the one side – pro-big business SNP nationalists on the other; unless the trade union movement helps socialists argue for a different vision of Scotland's and Britain's future, those will be the false choices on offer.

And unless ordinary working class people are offered a worthwhile vision for improved standards of living, they could be disenfranchised and miss the unique opportunity to open the door to a future free of poverty and inequality.

3 In launching the 'No' campaign alongside his Tory allies, Labour's **Alistair Darling** (of the rich!) whipped up fear of the unknown, claiming workers will be less impoverished, less unemployed, 'better together' as part of the British state.

But rather than falling for this fantasy, workers would be better served to show fear - and loathing - for what they already

know all too well: the ruthless exploitation, poverty pay, pauperised pensions, and waste of a whole generation under the capitalist state of Britain that we have known for centuries. Independence from the Westminster butchers is good enough reason to vote YES in 2014!

4 Darling whipped up fear of job losses if Scots dare demand self rule. Hardly convincing from the former Labour Chancellor who warned of cuts even deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher if a Westminster Labour government was re-elected. Or from a Unionist in defence of a British state where they're building a very expensive aircraft carrier (with no aircraft!) as just one reflection of predicted austerity and jobs slaughter for the next 10-20 years.

An independent Scottish government could instead expand job opportunities for defence industry workers, through peaceful jobs diversification, as demonstrated by several studies by the STUC and others. It could expand civil service jobs, for instance by taking on more in HMRC to chase up tax-dodging millionaires and businesses, and thereby expand public services.

5 The British capitalist state defended by Tory, Lib Dem and Labour unionists has a blood-stained history of colonial plunder, and currently acts as junior partners in imperialist crimes to the ruling class of the USA, e.g. in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. The breakup of that undemocratic imperialist power through Scottish independence would be a mighty blow in favour of workers, democracy and international solidarity - and a devastating blow to the parties of big business who exploit public and private sector workers at home.

6 Disproportionate numbers of young working class Scots men and women are economic conscripts into the armed forces, through lack of civilian jobs and trades. They then become part of the killing machines in countries whose populations never asked to be invaded by the British army - and many of them tragically lose their lives in the process.

Neither current devolution, nor the vague sop of Devo-Max, would give the elected Scottish government the power to refuse to invade other nations for oil, pres-

tige and profit. Only full-scale self-government, Independence, would grant that right to the Scottish people.

7 Likewise, only an independently-governed Scotland could demand and implement the removal of nuclear bases from the Clyde, including the very real WMDs, Trident - whilst guaranteeing jobs and conditions to all workers at the nuclear bases through diversification into socially useful, peaceful jobs.

8 The SSP's vision of Scotland's future is not only a world apart from the poverty-stricken, unequal, increasingly undemocratic British capitalist state advocated by Tory, Lib Dem and Labour. Our vision - and we believe also that of the wider trade union movement - is also diametrically opposed to much of what the SNP stand for. That is added reason for the unions to urgently campaign for a Scotland that is entirely different from either the unionist or SNP versions.

9 The SSP doesn't want independence in order to swap the Union Jack for the Saltire; rule by the Bank of England for rule by the Bank of Scotland (and the Bank of England!!); or low-paying, tax-dodging British capitalists and bankers for their Tartan-clad equivalents.

We want a Scotland free of the Westminster butchers; free of cuts; free of low pay, skinflint benefits and pauperised pensions; free of mass unemployment that wastes a young generation who face the choice of miserly benefits or slave wages; an independent socialist Scotland that looks after the millions, not the millionaires - a society where we genuinely would be 'better together'!

In the referendum debate, the central task for workers is to decide what changes they want carried out to better their lives, and then demand the powers to carry out those changes.

10 The SNP want the Scottish people to be ruled by an unelected monarch. The Scottish Socialist Party wants a modern, democratic, inclusive republic, with all vestiges of medieval privileges banished, and full rights of equality for all regardless of ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or religion.

LABOUR'S EMPTY PROMISES ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND POVERTY PAY

by Jim Bolland,
SSP councillor for the
Leven ward, West
Dunbartonshire

YOUTH poverty in West Dunbartonshire is about to increase dramatically as the Labour Council implement slavery wages of £2.65 per hour for around 200 apprentices.

Before the elections in May 2012, Labour promised to review these paltry wages but have went ahead and enforced them without change.

Poverty levels in West Dunbartonshire are the second highest in Scotland out of the 32 Local Authority areas.

Labour are using the high levels of unemployment to blackmail young people into taking on these so called "apprenticeships" at £2.65 per hour.

Tragedy

The West Dunbartonshire Council region has the highest unemployment rate in Scotland, and Labour are using this human tragedy to pay slave wages to our young people who want to work but will not survive on £2.65 per hour.

Six weeks after taking office and awarding themselves £20,000 in expenses, Labour made the biggest attack on local democracy and accountability by cutting the monthly meetings to just four per year.

Labour have also implemented the same timetable for all major committees again denying



SUPERMARKET CHEAP: councils are copying private companies like Sainsbury's, who exploit cheap labour in 'apprenticeship' schemes by paying slave wages

the public access and cutting the scrutiny by opposition Councillors.

Labour are now part-time councillors on £20,000 a year while they insist young people work for £2.65.

Eight of the twelve Labour councillors have full time jobs outside the council, which is the main

the council and make decisions in private away from the opposition, public and the press.

Contrast the treatment of our young people with the greed of the banks who manipulated the internal bank rate to increase their already massive profits.

The whole banking sector

which influences the British economy.

Local Authorities should not behave the same as Sainsbury's and the other big private companies who are employing cheap labour in these "apprenticeship" schemes by paying slave wages.

Councils have a responsibility to treat all employees with equality and fairness and pay a living wage and provide good working conditions linked to a good learning environment.

The Scottish Socialist Party intend to raise this issue with West Dunbartonshire Council at the first opportunity and work alongside the Council Trade Unions to have these slave wages replaced with a working wage for our young people.

Labour use high levels of unemployment to blackmail young people into taking on these so-called 'apprenticeships' at £2.65 per hour...

reason they cannot populate the committees and went part time which will also lead to un-elected officers having more delegated powers to run

should be nationalised immediately to protect the public from the rampant greed of the banks and to ensure we have control over an important sector



Crude militaristic propaganda

PLANE WRONG: *Red Tails* seems designed to entice young African-Americans to sign up for the US military

Red Tails (12A). Directed by **Anthony Hemingway** and produced by **George Lucas**

by *Alex Miller*

THIS film, produced by George Lucas (of *Star Wars* fame), is based on the true story of the Tuskegee Army Airfield - an all-black squadron in the US Air Force in World War 2.

They're called the Red Tails because of the distinctive way the tails of their aircraft are painted.

Given the level of institutional racism the film depicts, it could have been quite a powerful anti-racist - possibly even anti-war -

production. The fact that a mainstream American movie is willing to publicise the fact that segregation and discrimination existed within the military is also positive.

In reality, however, it comes across as a film designed to entice young African-American men to sign up for one of the US military's current overseas misadventures.

While in combat over Italy in 1944, the black pilots shout things like "Hallelujah, the saints are marching in!", "No touchdown for you today, Fritz!" and "The sky is blue, my guns are hot!".

It portrays war as a game - there is talk among the

pilots of scorecards recording how many of the 1970s comic book style Germans they can kill.

It is also completely unrealistic: the hero of the *Red Tails* squadron manages to all but sink a German destroyer simply by strafing it a couple of times with machine gun fire.

He also manages to win a beautiful Italian girl as his wife by waving at her as he flies past her rooftop (having just despatched a German armoured train by a couple of machine gun blasts).

The *Red Tail* squadron's main complaint against the Air Force top brass seems to be that it doesn't send

them on sufficiently exciting or dangerous missions, and when they find out that they will be up against a crack German fighter jet outfit there are whoops of delight all round.

Many of the whites in the film are initially portrayed as racist.

But once they realise that the *Red Tails* are willing to brave it out for Uncle Sam their racism subsides.

The pro-war message couldn't be clearer. When the *Red Tails* get a presidential commendation at the end of the film, you half expect Obama himself to put in an appearance.

Overall, crude militaristic propaganda.

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GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING: THEATRE CAN SERIOUSLY DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH

by Sandra Webster

FOR some people, theatre is just an evening out where they can be entertained. It's not a dialogue between the actor and audience, just entertainment and a chance to sit back and relax. Even so some contentious and revolutionary ideas are used as the backdrop of some of the most mainstream theatre shows such as *Les Misérables* and *Evita*.

Most audiences or actors do not have to worry that their performances will be of interest to the police, and may even lead to arrest and persecution. Some companies and performers use their art as a means of protest and a way of getting a message across that is in odds with that of the state. Such theatre becomes more radical and a political tool.

For as long as there has been theatre, it has been used to speak out against injustice, as far back as in ancient Greece. In Roman times, it was used as a means of preventing civil unrest. "Panem et Circens", or bread and circuses was the means used to placate the poor by providing basic food and entertainment.

Lampoon

In pre-revolutionary France and Russia, actors could lampoon politicians, while open dissent would mean much more interest from the secret police.

Up until 1974, the 1876 "Dramatic Performance Act" meant that some performances were banned in India. The act was created by the British Raj who wanted to prevent "seditious" theatre which spoke out against their rule.

Today, artistes across the world - even in our own modern, democratic country - find



ACTING SUSPICIOUSLY: Radical Anthropology Group's Chris Knight was arrested ahead of last year's royal wedding protest performance - a mock execution of Prince Andrew

their writing and plays still gain the attention of a fan base they wish they didn't have.

Belarus Free Theatre was formed by husband and wife Nikolai Khalezin and Natalia Koliada. Their performances in their native country have to be underground so they are not broken up by the police. They perform in people's homes and never advertise. They are held in high regard all over the world and have the support of the theatre community.

Performing street theatre after the election of Alexander Lukashenko, both Koliada and Khalezin were arrested. Thanks to international pressure, both were later released but Khalezin has to remain in hiding for his own safety.

Theatre can be taken very seriously by the British state too - even street theatre. Before the royal wedding earlier this year, several people were arrested before the event even took place. Among these people was Chris

Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group who, along with other actors, intended to perform and demonstrate against the royal wedding.

But they were not able to, as the day before they were arrested for a "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance"! They were detained for 24 hours, then released without charge.

Police

As a member of Acting Strange Theatre Company, I never imagined that our short scripts - which were written to be performed at Faslane Peace Camp as part of their 30th birthday celebrations - could be regarded as something that the police were interested in.

However, they used our messages posted on social network sites and visited us to ask our intentions.

It has made us aware that it is becoming more dangerous to protest.

The police are using anti-ter-

rorist legislation to target those exercising their democratic right to demonstrate.

Myself and other members of Acting Strange will continue to use our performances as a means to entertain and make people think.

For us and for many more, that is what performance is all about. Long may theatre continue to be radical, dangerous and even seditious.

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Free Baba Jan and the Hunza Five

by *Pauline Bradley*

BABA Jan Hunzai, Iftikhar Hus-sain, Amir Ali, Ameer Khan and Rashid Minhas are all political prisoners who have been illegally detained in north Pakistan for over eight months. They've suffered torture and lack of medical attention.

The SSP International committee wrote to the Pakistan Consul protesting at the treatment of the comrades. Shortly afterwards they were seen by a doctor.

In January 2010, a mountain collapsed into the Hunza River and created a lake. Many villages were submerged, over 1000 were displaced and over 25,000 were cut off as the lake had destroyed the one road that connects the area to the rest of Pakistan. The plight of the people of the Gilgit-Baltistan area was ignored by the government.

Baba Jan, an activist of Labour Party of Pakistan toured the country lobbying for the government to act, but the Pakistan Peoples Party government were too late. To calm the protests of displaced people, they promised compensation.

Live ammunition

But compensation never arrived for some people. Out of 457 families, 25 of the families did not receive their compensation. Allegedly it went instead to families who were sympathisers of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party.

When the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Mehdi Shah visited the town of Aliabad in August, around 200 people protested for the rights of the 25 families. The police used batons, tear gas and live ammunition. They killed Afzal Baig, a 22-year-old student, then Baig's father who was trying to retrieve the body of his son. The valley erupted and a police station was burnt down by the protestors.

Baba Jan arrived six hours later. He organised the protesters who were promised an investigation and firm action against

the police officers responsible for the killing. The protesters waited for the government to act. It acted a week later by arresting numerous protestors including

Baba Jan. While most of those arrested have been released on bail, Baba Jan and four activists remain behind bars.

Awareness and international



BABA JAN HUNZAI: still in illegal detention in Pakistan

solidarity is growing in support of Baba Jan and his comrades, known as the Hunza Five. A week of action took place at the end of June. This included a symbolic hunger strike in Karachi, pickets in Sri Lanka, Frankfurt, Berlin and Tokyo. Here in Scotland the Glasgow International paper regularly covers the story and Asian MP Anas Serwar has promised to raise the matter with the foreign office.

It's essential that we keep the pressure on and awareness raised so that Baba Jan is not forgotten or "disappeared" but is released with his comrades immediately.

• For more info go to:
freebabajan.wordpress.com/tag/week-of-action/

PARAGUAY COUP CONDEMNED

by *Norman Lockhart*

THE Latin American governments of Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia as well as Venezuela, Ecuador and Dominican Republic have protested against the removal of President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay.

A colourful ex-bishop influenced by liberation theology, Fernando Lugo was democratically elected President of the Republic of Paraguay in April 2008 with over 40 per cent of the popular vote.

The umbrella presidential campaign, Frente Guasú, brought together about two-dozen left organisations. But at the same time they were running 11 different slates for the legislative. This presidential victory was based on many compromises and has also been one source of weakness.

This campaign had been on a programme of agrarian reform, wealth redistribution through tax increases on agro-industry, and anti-corruption in

South America's second poorest and most unequal country. He replaced the Colorado Party that had ruled for 61 years.

Lugo has been subject to several attempted impeachments starting early in 2009. This time it was based on a bloody confrontation between a landless peasant occupation and police trying to dislodge their encampment in a place called Curuguaty.

Dictatorship

Lugo was accused of failing to keep social order but had only a four-hour trial in an opposition-controlled congress. He has been replaced by his Vice President and arch enemy from the misnamed Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA) Federico Franco last month.

From 1954-1989, Paraguay suffered years of dictatorship under General Alfredo Stroessner. This anti-communist regime had been so brutal that even US President Reagan supported his overthrow by his

son-in-law Andrés Rodríguez, one of the most notorious drug traffickers in the country in another violent coup in 1989.

This saw the start of an improvement in human rights with legalisation of some, though not all, political parties.

Paraguay is a small country with a population of 6.5million - less than twice that of Scotland but geographically more than four times as big. It is landlocked and has borders with Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. The main exports are hydro electricity, soya beans and beef.

So far, little reform has been achieved by Lugo. It is not what he has achieved so far but the threat of further change that has mobilised thousands in the country on the streets to oppose this 'coup'. The next presidential and parliamentary elections were meant to be held next year.

In the UK, eight trade union general secretaries and eight MPs and MSP Neil Finlay have publicly supported the protests of the Latin American governments.

FRONTLINE STRUGGLE IN LATIN AMERICA

by Bill Bonnar

FOR the past decade Latin America has been on the frontline of the global struggle against capitalism and for a better future.

A succession of left of centre governments have come into office but even in those countries where that has not happened, powerful left movements have arisen.

The recent presidential election result in Mexico is a case in point. Andres Manuel Lopez of the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) won 31 per cent of the vote coming in a narrow second behind the winning candidate.

Their result would have been even more impressive but for voting irregularities and patronage which have become an almost permanent feature of Mexican politics.

Cheated

Not surprisingly this is designed to favour parties of the right. Still, it does not appear to be as bad as the election six years ago which most observers believed Lopez won but was cheated of victory in a massive electoral fraud.

Lopez and the PRD ran on clear left programme including bringing key parts of the Mexican economy into public owner-



ANDRES MANUEL LOPEZ: a narrow second in Mexican poll

ship and tough policies to tackle corruption, poverty and inequality. It also campaigned for Mexico to "march with the tide of history" and align itself with the progressive movement across the continent. The winner was Reno Nieto of the curiously named Institutional Revolutionary Party with 38 per cent.

This was the party which emerged from the revolutionary conflicts at the beginning of last century and which has governed Mexico for most of its modern history. Despite its name the party has

been synonymous with corruption, patronage, repression and a slavish loyalty to international capitalism.

Mexico sets a clear example of everything that is wrong with countries locked into the global capitalist system. Economic development is staggeringly uneven with rapid growth in a few centres against a general background of decades of economic stagnation.

The vast majority of the population live in poverty with only the 'dream' of moving to the slums of Mexico City or immigration to the United States as a way out.

The country is ruled by a rich elite closely aligned to the state which ensures that the country is governed in their interests. Power is then ceded down through a network of patronage which has created powerful localised vested interests much of it criminal in nature. Among other things this has fuelled drug wars which have resulted in more than 50,000 deaths in the last decade.

The forces of domestic and international capitalism in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America remain strong as they try to stem the tide of history. This was evident in recent events in Paraguay.

There, leftist President Lugo was removed in what was essentially a constitutional coup.

Similar to Mexico, Paraguay was ruled by the right wing Colorado Party for decades through a combination of repression, patronage and unwavering loyalty to the USA.

This party still controls most of the Lower House of Parliament largely through a corrupt and disjointed electoral system.

Mobilised

It was Lugo's proposals to bring in democratic reforms which no doubt prompted this coup. Perhaps international reaction is the most illuminating.

While the United States have welcomed the coup almost all Latin American governments have protested. Lugo is still in the country and this particular struggle has some way to go.

The greatest fear for the various ruling classes in Latin America and their international allies is that millions are now actively mobilised against them.

They recognise that radical change is necessary and that the current system is completely bankrupt. The corruption and repression is no longer working. They can delay the process but are unable to stop it.

The tide of history now is clearly marching in one direction.



'NO TO ELECTORAL FRAUD': protesters accuse Mexico election-winner Nieto of buying votes

UNDER 25? DO NOT PASS GO - DO NOT LEAVE HOME

by Sandra Webster

IN another of his “heart warming” speeches last week, David Cameron announced future plans to stop welfare benefits, including housing benefits, to young people under the age of 25. It was his usual message of hatred, and getting tough on benefit “scroungers” which seems to appeal especially to the readers of some other publications which shall remain nameless.

As always, these will have most impact on the poor. That seems to be an automatic conclusion these days when a new Con-Dem policy is announced.

Early adult life should be an adventure where you find your place in the world. It can also be a confusing and sometimes difficult one where tensions with parents runs high, leading to conflict. It is crucial that you have support around you.

My daughter’s friend is staying with us at the moment, sleeping on our sofa, as she had an argument where she was asked to leave home. I wonder if anyone would do that for my daughter if she was faced with the same circumstances?

Bullington Club

As usual, Cameron and his speech writers have not looked at some anomalies in his proposals - 53 per cent of the under-25s in receipt of housing benefit have children.

Would they cut off benefit to their children? Housing benefit is also payable to those in work and supports those on low income wages. If there is no longer housing benefit, what attraction is their for social mobility to move to areas where there is work?

Cameron and his privileged friends had a safety net of income when they were growing up. With economic support, even the ‘high jinks’ they got up to in the Bullington Club can be brushed over. Other young people are not so lucky and can find themselves getting caught up in the criminal justice system.

Some young people have to leave home



FK THE POOR! David Cameron wants to stop housing benefit for under-25s**

for their own safety. It is very easy to get caught up in a downward spiral of homelessness - not as easy to escape from.

Shelter estimate that one in four of their referrals about homelessness are from the under-25s.

The Citizen’s Advice Bureau saw an increase of 22 per cent in referrals from the under-25s in housing and benefit issues.

David Cameron promised that a safety net of benefits will still exist for all those in need. What has happened to the needs of some of the most vulnerable young people in our society?

At the very least, no matter how coldly Cameron thinks of them, they are future taxpayers who, given the right support, can move into education and work. We are back to the sad days when parental background

ensured privilege and opened doors for their own children.

The fact that Cameron still sees those in receipt of benefits as an easy target should be a warning to us all. People still listen to his lies and believe his propaganda. The poor continue to be an easy target.

Homelessness

As we look forward to the Independence Referendum in 2014, let’s never lose sight and campaign for those who are the hardest hit.

My daughter’s friend brought the issue home to me but I wonder how many other people’s sons and daughters are going to face homelessness and eviction when the benefit cuts start to affect even more people?

As individuals and as a party, it is something we must be prepared for.