

# Syria: State unleashes new terror

Judy Beishon

The death toll is rising from the Syrian army's brutal assault on the mass uprising in the city of Hama and other areas. Over 150 have been killed in the last week alone and many badly injured. People armed only with stones and wooden bats have heroically confronted tanks, showing a huge level of anger, courage and determination.

The state forces had previously pulled out of Hama in the face of repeated mass demonstrations, shut-downs and the erection of barricades. More and more protesters were going onto the streets, despite facing the possibility of death, detention and torture.

The repressive government of president Bashar al-Assad had effectively lost control of the city and wanted to regain it as the Muslim month of Ramadan approached.

The Ba'ath Party-dominated regime has suppressed dissent over decades and is now churning out propaganda blaming "armed groups" for the violence. But this is a mass uprising that has broken out in varying degrees across all provinces of Syria, inspired by the 'Arab Spring,' and now demanding that Assad goes. Significantly, in recent weeks there have been pockets of revolt in the two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo.

The crocodile tears of US president Obama and other imperialist leaders in the UN must be rejected for the self-interested posturing that they are. Syrian workers can only rely on their own mass defensive

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## The death toll is rising from the Syrian regime's assault on the city of Hama and other areas

and offensive action - as most of them rightly recognise - supported by workers internationally.

In its desperate struggle for survival, the regime has been trying to whip up division between different national, ethnic and religious sections of society.

To counter this, communities and workplaces need to democratically organise inter-ethnic defence bodies, with city-wide, regional and national coordination.

The movement also needs to organise to formulate a programme that can win over workers, soldiers and the poor who still support the Assad government, not least out of fear of what would follow its collapse.

Already, groups of rank and file soldiers have defected rather than shoot unarmed protesters.

Such a programme needs to take into account that overthrowing an autocratic regime is only part of the

necessary task, as has been shown in Tunisia and Egypt. Also needed is the building of a working class-led alternative that can remove every remnant of the former repressive and exploitative capitalist regime.

- For united struggle against the regime by the working class and poor in Syria drawn from all nationalities, ethnicities and religions
- For the building of democratically run committees in workplaces and communities for defence against repression and to develop the struggle
- No to any interference by the world or regional capitalist powers
- For independent trade unions and a new mass party of working people
- For a revolutionary constituent assembly
- For a majority workers' and poor people's government, with socialist policies, guaranteeing full democratic rights for all minorities

# The great PFI schools rip off - once again!

Phil Clarke

Before the 2010 general election Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg was correct when he said Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes are "a bit of dodgy accounting - a way in which the government can pretend they're not borrowing when they are, and we'll all be picking up the tab in 30 years."

Of course, quite predictably, since the coalition government was formed, Clegg has been completely silent about more PFI schemes being signed than in 2008 or 2009.

PFI, which in 2009 George Osborne (now Tory chancellor) called "discredited", is a scheme where private money is used to build public

buildings such as schools and hospitals - the private contractors then lease the building back to the public sector over a period of around 30 years.

The problem is that not only do PFI builds cost a great deal more than publicly run projects, but the private contractor ends up owning the building at the end of the lease!

For example, Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary cost £184 million to build, but through PFI it will cost the public more than £1 billion over 30 years. Add onto this the contracts for maintenance and repair private companies can get under PFI, where changing a light bulb can cost £333, and we have nothing short of a rip-off of the public sector for private profit.

While the government's constant refrain is 'we must all tighten our belts,' education minister Michael Gove is using PFI to finance his new school building scheme - already cut to £2 billion from the £55 billion 'Building Schools for the Future' Labour-initiated PFI scheme he scrapped.

An established hate figure for education workers, Gove is making hundreds of schools that desperately need new buildings go without, and making the minority who do get them pay massively over the odds with PFI. It will come as no surprise either that new schools, or those getting new buildings, will be pushed to become academies or 'free schools.'

If publicly built, publicly run state

comprehensive schools are cheaper and shown to be more successful, why are they not being built?

Even more tellingly, why won't Ed Miliband's Labour Party put this forward?

It is because all the major parties are more interested in promoting private profit in the public sector than in delivering services to us.

PFI, academies and free schools are, in the long term, about bringing in the private sector to make profit, not just out of building schools but running them.

Workers and unions must say 'No to PFI,' 'No to academies' and build a new mass workers' party that stands solidly for a publicly funded, publicly owned comprehensive education system.

## Fast news

### You scratch my back

The News International (NI) phone hacking scandal has exposed the symbiotic relationship between the Murdoch empire and the political establishment.

Since David Cameron became prime minister 15 months ago cabinet ministers have had private meetings with Murdoch executives more than 60 times. The figure rises to at least 107 if social events are included.

Labour shadow ministers, including Ed Balls, also met NI bigwigs on numerous occasions when rubbing shoulders with the 'Chipping Norton' set.

Chancellor George Osborne, currently trying to put a positive spin on the latest gloomy economy stats, has had 16 separate meetings since May 2010 with News International editors and executives.

Culture secretary Jeremy Hunt, after being given the government brief to oversee the Murdochs' attempted takeover of BSkyB, had two meetings with James Murdoch in which they discussed the takeover!

But the minister who sees Rupert Murdoch the most often is Michael Gove - education minister and a former News International employee.

Apart from fast-tracking academies, usually against the wishes of teachers, parents and students, Gove has seen Murdoch senior on six occasions since the last general election. Reportedly, over these 'breakfast, lunch and dinner meetings', Gove asked Rupert Murdoch if he would be interested in sponsoring one or two academies.

### Junk mail

Readers may be used to receiving utility bills and council tax demands through the letterbox but most people would be choking on their cornflakes if they received a demand for £1,500 each year for the next five years to pay for the government's austerity measures. Yet according to the International Monetary Fund that is effectively what every household in Britain will have to stump up through tax increases and cuts in benefits - a staggering £35 billion in total.

### Mind the gap

Health inequalities in Britain will widen due to the way government ministers have allocated resources within the NHS. According to a recent Commons health select committee report, prosperous areas will get more money than poorer ones.

For example, Manchester will see spending slashed by £41.7 million (a 4% fall) and Liverpool is being hit by a reduction of £33.3 million (-3.5%). County Durham will lose £26.1 million (-2.6%) and Tower Hamlets in East London will have £18.7 million (-4.1%) disappear from its budget. Meanwhile in the stockbroker belt of Surrey health spending will increase by £61.4 million (a 4.2% rise). Oxfordshire, which includes David Cameron's affluent Witney constituency, will get £22.1 million more (+2.6%). Last year the British Medical Journal reported that the health inequality gap is greater today than it was in the 1920s and 1930s. These inequalities are on top of the £20-£30 billion of 'efficiency savings' ie government cuts, currently being carried out by NHS health managers.

# Building a workers' political alternative to the establishment parties

The following resolution on the upcoming Greater London Assembly (GLA) elections was passed at the July meeting of the London Transport regional council of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT).

GLA elections - submitted by Neasden Branch

This branch/region supports the growing anti-cuts movement and we realise that a successful movement will require an industrial and political strategy. We realise that all three major political parties, including Labour, are making cuts in local authorities in London.

The London elections for the GLA and mayor present an opportunity for a trade union based anti-cuts challenge involving community and trade union campaigns. This could take place under the name of Trade Unionists Against Cuts, a registered name of

the Trade Unionists and Socialists Coalition (TUSC). This would give an anti-cuts electoral alternative to the electorate of London.

We believe the RMT in London should approach other trade union and working class campaigning forces to assess whether such a challenge is possible and to convene a meeting to discuss the possibilities [...]

The regional council will approach other trade unions and campaigns, as outlined above, to raise the idea of such an electoral challenge.

● There are three separate parts to the London election: 14 constituency candidates (elected by first past the post); a London wide list to elect eleven seats by a form of PR; the election of the mayor (two votes in order of preference). This means it is possible to stand a mayoral candidate while also supporting a second preference candidate against Boris Johnson.

I recently attended a well-run five day training course for workplace reps run by my union, the Communications Workers Union (CWU). The highlight for me was a discussion and vote on whether the CWU should continue to fund Labour. I listened to the usual arguments for, ie 'better to be inside than out', 'what is the alternative' and 'Labour will be different under Miliband', etc.

I argued that we have been constantly attacked by those we fund, ie Mandelson's postal privatisation attempt; that Miliband condemned the 30 June strikes; that New Labour has never officially backed striking workers; and that we're in the same position as the trade unions were before the formation of Labour over a century ago; that we need to build a new working class party.

Anyway, a vote was then taken on the issue of our union continuing to fund Labour. Result: Three for and 12 against! Conclusion: Does official CWU policy actually reflect the views of grassroots members?

Glen Watson, Coventry