

Peace Protest

Activist faces prosecution after flag demo

by Mark Metcalf

A prominent peace activist faces prosecution for trespass after she was arrested at Menwith Hill intelligence station near Harrogate, North Yorkshire, while protesting by carrying an upside-down American flag. The arrest of Lindis Percy took place on the day Barack Obama was inaugurated as President of the United States on January 21.

She had written the words "Now then...second and only chance Obama" on the flag. She wants the President to reduce American military involvement across the world and use the money

saved to address poverty in his own country.

Under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act of 2005 her case is now in the hands of the Attorney General, Dominic Greaves, who must decide whether she will face charges. The Crown Prosecution Service has been asked to examine police papers on the incident.

If Lindis Percy is sent to trial, it would be the second time she has faced a trespass prosecution under SOCPA. Two years ago, she successfully defended herself after she showed her driving licence to obtain entry to Mildenhall US Air Force base in Suffolk.



Lindis Percy: arrested

After wandering around the base unchallenged for more than an hour – during which time no criminal damage occurred – she was arrested as she made her way to the exit. Despite the prosecution calling five base witnesses, a district judge at Bury St Edmonds Magistrates' Court dismissed the case and criticised a security guard's evidence. CCTV coverage of the gate Ms Percy used to enter the base had "gone missing".

Ms Percy was also arrested in 2011 when she displayed outside the American Embassy in London an upside-down stars and stripes bearing the words "Independence from

America". She was threatened with arrest under SOCPA, detained for an alleged breach of the peace and then released without charge.

Ms Percy, a former nurse, also had charges of "wilfully obstructing three Ministry of Defence police officers in the execution of their duty" at Menwith Hill in 2011 dismissed. District Judge Jane Goodwin criticised arresting officers for failing to interview independent witnesses.

The Campaign for Accountability of American Bases holds a demonstration outside the main entrance at Menwith Hill every Tuesday evening. The base opened in 1951 and is under the control of the US forces. The site is a communications intercept and missile warning base that, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is "increasingly vital to US intelligence".

Dr Martin Schweiger, who regularly attends the CAAB pickets, said: "SOCPA is a very blunt instrument that can suppress legitimate peaceful public protest. It has never been properly debated in Parliament and is implemented by police officers interpreting the framework given to them by ministers."

Unions

London rally launches new fight

by Tony Burke

The Campaign for Trade Union Freedom is being launched with a rally at Friends House in central London on Saturday March 23 after a merger between the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions and the Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws.

Speakers will include Len McCluskey of Unite, Bob Crow of the RMT, Billy Hayes of the CWU, Manuel Cortes of the TSSA and Sarah Veale of the TUC.

The Campaign, which is supported by 25 unions, comes as the Conservative-led coalition prepares to launch more attacks on workers' rights, using the smokescreen of the global economic crisis.

Proposals from Wonga boss Adrian Beacroft, initially dismissed by Vince Cable as being "bonkers", are being dusted down and pushed through Parliament by the Tories' Liberal Democrat coalition "partners in shame", such as Jo Swinson.

These include making it harder for workers to seek work place justice at employment tribunals; extending the qualifying period to gain employment rights to two years; cutting the consultation period on redundancies from 90 to 45 days; and proposals to repatriate EU rights such as protection for agency and temporary workers as well as the scrapping of the Working Time Directive.

The Campaign will fight to defend and enhance trade unionism, oppose anti-union laws, and promote and defend collective bargaining not just in Britain, but in Europe and the rest of the world.

The Campaign believes that workers around the world are under attack by governments driving through a neo-liberal agenda to crush trade unions. In the Europe, long-held rights to collective bargaining are being dismantled. Countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy are using the crisis make it easier to sack workers.

In Mexico employers the government is using legislation to break independent trade unions and, in the United States, "right to work legislation" is being used to hit back at unions who delivered for Barack Obama.

For more information visit www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk or follow the Campaign on Twitter @unionfreedom

Water

Call to plug tax loophole

by Keith Richmond

Sutton and East Surrey Water, with 600,000 customers in east Surrey, west Sussex, west Kent, and south London, has been condemned by campaigners for exploiting a tax loophole to pay just 6 per cent tax on its operating profit last year.

The company made £17 million profit on turnover of £57 million – but paid just £1 million tax.

The normal rate of corporation tax,

which applies when profits exceed £1.5 million, is 24 per cent but SESW is one of six British water companies which "borrows" from overseas tax havens to reduce the tax it pays in the United Kingdom from money it makes trading in this country.

Corporate Watch, which revealed that SESW moved £60 million in quoted eurobonds through the Channel Islands to reduce its tax liability, said: "This is money that should be spent on schools, hospitals and roads".

Economy

Inflation up, wages stagnant

by Keith Richmond

The Conservative-led coalition came under more pressure when, the day before the Budget, official figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed that consumer price inflation rose in February to 2.8 per cent. The Bank of England's inflation target is 2 per cent and businesses, economists and consumer groups lined up to attack the Chancellor for his handling of the economy.

Cathy Jamieson, Labour's Shadow Treasury Minister, said: "Rising inflation and stagnant wages mean the squeeze on people on middle and low incomes is getting ever tighter. But this Government is making things worse, not better."

"Millions will pay more as tax credits and child benefit are cut while millionaires pay less. The Government must act to kick start our flatlining economy and help people struggling with the rising cost of living."

Backbiter by Birch

