

### BAHRAIN WATCH AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HISTORICAL RECORD

The British Foreign Office (FCO) has received Information Rights Tribunal support for its refusal to make public the full text of a 1977 file "Bahrain: Internal Political situation 1977". This development follows a Freedom of Information request from academic researcher and member of Bahrain Watch, Marc Jones. As Bahrain Watch reported on 10th March [<https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2015/03/10/fco-claims-38-year-old-secret-document-would-jeopardise-british-base-in-bahrain/>]:

"The FCO refused to disclose the full file arguing to reveal the information would damage international relations. (Marc Jones) complained to the Information Commissioner who rejected his complaint on the basis that prejudice would be caused to the UK's relations with Bahrain if it was made public."

Instead of the complete file, a redacted version has been released. Jamie Merrill of The Independent, reporting [<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/government-refuses-to-release-details-of-relationship-with-authoritarian-bahrain-10099197.html>] on this most recent rebuff regarding the file, quotes Marc Jones' response:

"My appeal is reflecting public concern that the British Government has insulated the Government of Bahrain from criticism of serious human rights abuses including torture, and may have concealed evidence of serious wrong-doing. In the unredacted information, there are indications that the withheld information could contain information important in understanding why the British-led Bahrain police force had a tendency towards deviance and torture."

Specifically regarding the British connection, Merrill observes that the 1977 text contains details of discussions between British officials and Ian Henderson, then in control of the Bahraini police force.

Though hardly a household name in Britain, Ian Henderson was a major figure among Bahrain ruling circles both before and after the country's declaration of independence in 1971. In addition to acting as a senior British state operative within the Bahrain protectorate, he served as a colonial officer in the infamously British ruled Kenya of the 1950's. As long ago as 1996, in an article entitled Briton at the heart of Bahrain's brutality rule, Robert Fisk [<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/briton-at-the-heart-of-bahrains-brutality-rule-1319571.html>] memorably characterised Henderson's

professional modus operandi in his Gulf incarnation:

"Ian Stewart MacWalter Henderson has torturers on his staff. In the embattled state of Bahrain, he is the most feared of all secret policemen, the General Director of Security and head of the State Investigation Department, a 67-year-old ex-British police superintendent whose officers routinely beat prisoners, both in the basements of the SIS offices and in the al-Qalaa jail. Leaders of the Bahraini opposition believe he is the power behind the throne of Sheikh Issa bin Salman al-Khalifa, and they may well be right."

Fisk's account, of course, is entirely at odds with the Foreign Office narrative of the British state as essentially a civilising, pro-human rights influence within Bahrain. Denizens of Whitehall, perhaps remarkably, are still banging on to that effect. But as was demonstrated, yet again, in the forcible dismantling of the Bahrain Teachers Association within wider suppression of the mass movement for political reform of 2011, two centuries of British rule or influence have left a regime where popular rights, centrally trade union rights, count for nothing. The planned permanent British military base, as a forthcoming article on this website will argue, should be opposed by trade unionists internationally as consolidation of tyranny and validation of the state of generalised repression that is post-2011 Bahrain.

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