

UCU London Retired Members Branch Motion on Jamal Khashoggi

This branch both endorses recent initiatives protesting the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and advances additional proposals for dissemination and discussion within the labour movement.

First, we support the decision of a substantial body of prominent artists, writers and journalists to contact the Secretary-General of the United Nations in connection with the killing. Evoking the 2012 document “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”, the signatories of the open letter appeal:

“In the spirit of that initiative, we respectfully call on you to immediately authorize an independent, international investigation into Jamal Khashoggi’s disappearance and apparent murder.”

Such a step would help ensure that the outrage remains a salient public issue. More specifically, it conceivably could shed light on currently unknown aspects, including the possibility of active or passive support by Saudi allies. The investigation call, organised through the human rights-oriented Pen America network, merits union solidarity and we will inform Pen America of our support.

Second, we welcome the vigils arranged in Dublin and London by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) as part of wider International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) actions. We will seek guidance from the NUJ on appropriate means of supporting their initiatives.

Finally, it is imperative that our solidarity as trade unionists addresses the labour movement dimension of the killing of Khashoggi. Significantly, the Pen America open letter charges the Saudi regime with “*a sweeping assault on free expression and association*”.

Two points should be made here.

First, the open letter rightly associates free expression with freedom of association. An important principle is being asserted through that linkage, which acknowledges the crucial relationship between rights of critical expression on the one hand and the right to organise independently on the other.

Secondly, that principle is diminished if restricted to the “*...writers, journalists, human rights advocates, and lawyers...*” identified in the open letter. Support for all progressive manifestations of resistance to Saudi repression is of the highest priority. The struggle in that country for elementary worker rights, including rights to organise and strike, is crucial for overcoming barriers between the migrant and “national” workforce sectors. Simultaneously, movement toward a truly human life requires supersession of the unequal status imposed collectively and individually on women.

Accordingly, this branch urges UCU and the labour movement in Britain:

- Support the NUJ and Pen America initiatives in opposition to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi;
- Support calls and struggles for citizen rights including rights of expression and association in

Saudi Arabia. Centrally these include the right to strike and the right to non-discriminatory status for specifically victimised sectors such as women and migrant workers.

These solidarity measures correspond to transitional advances toward abolition of monarchical absolutism and the distinctive forms of class parasitism associated with it. As a first step we are forwarding our motion to UCU London Region for consideration as a contribution to the international policy of our union.

Resistance is currently limited, not least because of the terrorist nature of the Saudi state and the corresponding character of its response to such dissent as does manifest. Ongoing military-oriented support for the despotism from countries including Britain and the USA is another, closely related obstacle to open opposition.

However unpredictable the concrete dynamics of change, labour solidarity will be a key component. In Britain, with its imperial legacy, the workers' movement including unions carries a particular responsibility to support progressive opposition within the decaying aftermath of empire. Such linkage is our answer to the ongoing alliance of the British ruling class and its state on the one hand with their Saudi counterparts on the other.

Links

NUJ accounts of candle-lit vigils for Jamal Khashoggi outside the Dublin and London Saudi embassies:
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-hold-candle-lit-vigil-for-jamal-khashoggi-at-the-saudi/>

Pen America open letter to the UN Secretary-General:
<https://pen.org/investigate-jamal-khashoggi-disappearance-murder/>

UCU London Retired Members fuller analysis of the Khashoggi murder:
<http://ucu-retired-london.org.uk/jamal-khashoggi/>

(drafted by Dave Binns, 20 November 2018)