



## London Retired Members Branch

### SOLIDARITY WITH THE TEACHERS OF BAHRAIN: NEWS FROM EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

In a recent statement, *Bahraini human and trade union rights defenders receive global Award*, Education International (EI) reports that Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi Abu Dheeb, leaders of the suppressed Bahrain Teachers Association (BTA), have been awarded this year's *Arthur Svensson International Prize for Trade Union Rights*.

For more than two years UCU London Retired Members (LRM) branch have publicly opposed the atrocious treatment of the BTA and other Bahraini opponents of the absolute monarchy. Both within the UCU and in the labour movement more broadly we have argued for, and sought to promote, solidarity with the BTA and the struggle for political and social transformation from which that union is inseparable. In May of this year our branch's motion on Bahrain (Motion 45) was carried at UCU Congress. Its central call is for involvement within an independent class framework:

*Congress instructs NEC to:*

- a. support campaigns against the base and against arming or training security forces of repressive regimes within the region*
- b. work with EI and TUC for unbanning Bahrain Teachers Association, and for the release of Mahdi Abu Dheeb*
- c. work with MENA Solidarity to produce a public report on human rights in Bahrain, making recommendations to the NEC for future solidarity action, including an international trade union led inquiry into British support for the regime.*

Against this policy background, UCU must both welcome and publicise award of the Prize to Jalila and Mahdi. The decision of the Svensson Committee gives deserved recognition to the labour movement dimension of the Bahraini struggle. The award was established by *Industri Energy*, an alliance of mainly energy and petroleum workers within the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions. Its core aim, the Svensson website observes, is "*...to promote and strengthen trade unions and trade union rights internationally.*"

Such acknowledgement of the contribution of the BTA leaders takes labour movement support for their struggle far beyond the ranks of education sector unions. In addition it reinforces the international scope of workers' opposition to the regime, in particular its treatment of our BTA sisters and brothers. On both counts the importance of this development is not easy to exaggerate, since the issues raised by the BTA suppression both address colonial style international influence and are of class, rather than purely occupational or professional, significance.

Thus, in the Spring of 2011, when the current state crackdown began, its targets included specifically labour unions, including the BTA, within the movement for constitutional reform and human rights. Through those actions the Bahraini state and its allies displayed a clear enough understanding of the relationship between independent union organisation and democratisation of the wider society. Their strategy involved suppression on both fronts, which are really two sides of the same coin, and four years on all key issues remain unresolved.

Consistent with the prevailing effective stalemate, the ongoing nature of the attack on the BTA is emphasised in EI's report on the Svensson Prize:

*"Mahdi Abu Dheeb, currently incarcerated, was sentenced to five years in prison. His health condition worsens steadily due to a lack of essential and critical medical aid. He is recognised as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.*

*Jalila al-Salman was released after nearly six months in prison, but suffers still from a job ban and restrictions to her right to free speech."*

EI also reports worsening conditions in Jou Prison, where the tyranny confines many political prisoners. In the cells of Jou, EI notes, there has taken place *"a wide and horrific crackdown on inmates...which included severe beatings, insults, degrading treatment and denial of medical treatment and basic rights, such as sanitation."*

Simultaneous with this deterioration, the move toward a permanent military base in Bahrain denotes a further attempt on the part of the British state to both legitimise and physically reinforce the regime. Alongside the US Fifth Fleet, such a presence can only intensify the climate of intimidation which, according to many credible accounts, pervades Bahraini society. Our labour movement response needs to be as international, and at least as coherent, as the repression imposed in Bahrain. Developing solidarity across the barbed wire fences that our rulers have raised between us becomes a pressing and immediate need in the face of the escalating reactionary engagement of the British state.

It is important, post-Congress, to leave no doubt about the strength of feeling throughout our union regarding Bahrain. To that end, LRM branch - alongside retired members groups elsewhere - can play a significant role in the next phase of policy development. Not only do we have a large membership with rich educational and union experience, both collectively and individually. In addition, many of us retain links with former colleagues still employed in Further and Higher Education. Alongside more formal work through union structures, networking with workplace based contacts and friends can be an important vehicle for change in this situation. Further, the ongoing incarceration of Mahdi Abu Dheeb makes it a priority to *educate, agitate and organise* around the cause of the Bahrain teachers and other regime victims *wherever we are able within the labour movement.*

To reinforce and add weight to what is now UCU policy, expressions of solidarity at local and regional levels are now needed. Branch motions condemning the regime and in particular the persecution of the BTA are a powerful means to spread awareness of the still little known Bahraini repression. But to be more fully effective, relationships of solidarity must be extended beyond the education sector to win additional support in trades councils and, through them, within the wider labour movement. Further, opposition should explicitly identify and address the key British role in arming and, in a range of ways, seeking to validate the tyranny.

*~ Implement the Glasgow Congress Bahrain Motion!*

*~ Solidarity with the Bahrain Teachers Association!*

*~ For an International Trade Union Led Inquiry into Repression in Bahrain!*

*~ Oppose the British Base!*

*~ Help Break the Silence!*

## Some Links

The Education International report on the award of the Prize to Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi Abu Dheeb:

[http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news\\_details/3578](http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/3578)

Arthur Svensson International Prize for Trade Union Rights website:

<http://www.svenssonprize.com/>

The Svensson Prize statement on the Bahraini teachers' award:

<http://www.svenssonprize.com/archive/the-2015-arthur-svensson-prize-to-leaders-of-bahrain-teachers-association/>

Industri Energi website (automatically translated from Norwegian to English):

<http://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=no&u=http://www.industrienergi.no/&prev=search>

Website of Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (an indispensable source of ongoing analysis and reporting on Bahrain from a human rights standpoint):

<http://birdbh.org/>

Text of UCU Congress 2015 Bahrain Motion 45 in full:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=7521#45>

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