

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER CARBON RICH, CASH POOR ...

SchNEWS

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Are You Carbon SchNEUTRAL?

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Guilty about yer weekly radical read? Don't worry, now you can agitate and save the planet at the same time! Send SchNEWS just £20 and help sponsor our very own pine tree in Latvia. We'll "offset" our carbon footprint, then when the tree is mature, cut it down, pulp it and send you a special edition of SchNEWS printed on it!



It's the spend of the world as we know it. 

FOREST GRUMP

SchNEWS uproots the carbon offsetting myth

Where there's a crisis there's a cash-cow, and while SchNEWS has looked before at the stupidities of industrial carbon trading (See SchNEWS 514), it's time to turn up the heat on those firms at the cashing in consumers fears about Climate Change. This week activists from London Rising Tide occupied the offices of the Carbon Neutral Company (CNC), at the forefront of the dubious practice of carbon offsetting. Rising Tide had been invited to take part in the load of hot air that is the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Climate Change (chaired by CNC) - but sensibly they chose to barricade themselves inside the CNC offices instead. They left voluntarily at 4.30pm without arrest, meanwhile others had carried out an action outside the company's offices in Kings Cross.

CNC's stock in trade is exploiting western guilt about the state of the environment. People send 'em cash and in exchange trees are planted (or not) to offset carbon emitted by the now guilt-free paying customer. Does selling units of carbon amount to the privatisation of the atmosphere? Are customers buying hot air? We aren't talking small potatoes here - 'voluntary' offsetting was worth around £20m in 2005 and is expected to top £300m over the next three years. Maybe money does grow on trees after all...

CNC's founder, lifelong tree-hugger Dan Morrell (ex-video game importer, fashion retailer, night-club owner and advertising middleman), got creative when he saw the potential of the new market in 'carbon trading' - where in effect 'units' of emissions become commodities to be bought and sold. And who makes up his market? Rich people in high-polluting countries who feel guilty but want to be able to throw money at the problem. People who simply have to make that weekend shopping trip to New York, but don't want to feel too bad.

Morrell's latest attempt to cash in on the forthcoming apocalypse is media circus 'Global Cool', where such scientific luminaries as the Foo Fighters and Sheryl Crow line up to help make saving the planet sexy. He's even roped in Tony Blair to hold a celeb-studded do earlier this month in aid of it. Their slogan? 'sign up and save a planet' (see www.global-cool.com). And of course this whole enterprise is pushing carbon offsetting as a solution - Now that's synergy! Rising Tide make the analogy that if the planet was a running bath, full almost to the brim, then offsetting CO2 emissions is like saying "I won't turn off my tap. I'll pay someone else £10 to pay someone else £2 to turn off their own tap." This, of course, in no way faces up to the reality that just about every tap needs

to become a mere dribble with global carbon emissions needing to go down 60-90%.

Even if the Carbon Neutral Company was planting the trees paid for, the whole exercise is next to useless. Desperate Dan claims that it would take ten trees to cancel out the carbon emissions of one US citizen for four months. So if the average Brit goes through six trees worth per four months - eighteen a year - do the math! To cover the whole country's emissions it would require a billion trees a year to be planted. Within 30 years the whole country would be completely covered in pines. At least there'd be no room for airport expansions...

Fluffily-named carbon eco-capitalists like 'Climate Care', 'Offset My Life' are offering similar cynical products Our favourites CNC were flogging this package for £12.50: a Valentines Green Box with some organic chocolate, a keyring made of recycled leather, and - get this - a certificate for one month of carbon neutral driving - where 325kg of carbon has been set aside allowing 1,000 miles of happy motoring. Bargain! Conservation charity Trees for Life were offering the chance to buy your loved one a dedicated Scots pine in Caledonia for £15 - or snap up the special two for £20 deal!

Badly Run Forest Run

The Rising Tide occupation came the day after a Carbon Trade Watch report was published. "The Carbon Neutral Myth - Offset Indulgences for your Climate Sins," is highly critical of the offsets industry, arguing that not only are supposed climate benefits impossible to quantify, but that projects are also being imposed on communities in the global South with little consultation.

The report also explains how these companies are using number-crunching trickery to boost their eco-friendly boasts - similar to the profit-inflating scam pulled by energy-criminals Enron. The wheeze is called 'future value accounting' and in the tree-planting game it basically means that when your eco-merchants 'sell' you a tree, they do so on the basis that a certain amount of carbon emissions will be offset or neutralised - but the truth is that this figure is actually an estimate based on the tree's whole lifetime and what it may neutralise in the future if it stays healthy and reaches full maturity - in up to one hundred years time! Whether there will still be an environment suitable for sustaining that tree in a century's time does not come into the equation.

In addition, these great claims are made despite the fact that there has only been limited research into the actual long term

CRAP OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR

SchMOVIES invites video footage of any so-called guardians of the law - both cops and private goons - going wildly over the top, laying down the law badly or just plain gettin' it wrong... Best entries will be posted on the website and included on the next DVD. The overall winner will face a surprise visit from a SchNEWS camera crew in attempt to present the award. Send your submissions (including as much background info as poss!) to SchNEWS, Community Base, 113 Queens Rd Brighton BN1 3XG.

* www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies

benefits of tree-planting. "Carbon in a tree is not stored safely," says Jutta Kill, of the environment group Fern. "Trees burn, trees die down, there's insect infestation." Last year WWF, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace issued a statement saying they do not support forestry projects to offset carbon emissions and last month a new US study claimed that where you plant makes a massive difference to effectiveness -

Little independent monitoring is done to ensure that plantations are properly managed, or exist at all. Take the roaring success of the project between green rockers Coldplay and CNC where the carbon emissions from the production of their last CD was to be offset by 10,000 mango trees in India. 40% of the saplings died because villagers didn't have the water to support them, and money promised to villagers to maintain the trees didn't come through. In Uganda (and other places across the global South), people have been expelled from their land to make way for plantation schemes, while workers are paid below subsistence wages for toiling on the West's conscience-relief fantasies.

So in the end offset companies just breed complacency by selling 'peace of mind' to consumers. They are just another way of exploiting the poorest people for profit and only offer more distraction from the critical task of tackling our unsustainable consumption patterns and business practices. Tree-mend-us!

* For more see www.carbontradewatch.org

* For the full 'The Carbon Neutral Myth' report see www.carbontradewatch.org/pubs/carbon_neutral_myth.pdf

* Last week a group of activists in Manchester added up the carbon footprint of some local businesses and demonstrated their effect by painting the footprints on the pavement outside. See the photos at www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/02/361740.html

* March 17th is **Rising Tide Scotland's 'Climate Action Gathering'**, with talks, discussion and workshops at 3 Bristo Place, Edinburgh from 9am-6pm. www.risingtide.org.uk/climate-action-gathering-2007

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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DEVILISH BEHAVIOUR

It's been another summer of direct action in Tasmania as the two year battle to protect old growth forests in the Weld Valley, just outside the area protected by a World Heritage listing, continues. This is just the latest chapter in a decades-old fight to preserve the region's giant Huon Pines, host to many endangered species, such as the Wedge-tailed Eagle. The baddies in this piece are the government's enforcers, Forestry Tasmania, who are pushing infrastructure and roads for logging through forests, and Gunns Ltd, the ethically-challenged logging giant (See SchNEWS 536).

In January, as the carnage continued through the Lower Weld and Upper Florentine Valley, so did the direct action to stop it. On the 29th, operations were halted when activists locked on to machinery, and one suspended themselves in a tree-sit, attached by rope to quarrying machines. All four were arrested. Last week, when the area was visited by the Director General of the World Heritage Centre, there were more tree-sits to prevent logging work.

To add more momentum to the campaign, last Friday Forestry Tasmania lost their 11th-hour attempt to place an injunction on the Huon Valley Environment Centre and six of its members. The injunction, designed to prevent them from publicising a protest that Sunday, was denied after the Chief Justice ruled that the prosecution evidence was inadmissible. The protest was a planned 'walk-in' (a more active 'sit-in') through the forest, inside an exclusion zone intended for destruction, which falls the wrong side of the 'world heritage' area boundary. Around 50 protesters were met by police inside the zone and warned that they could be charged with trespass, but nearly all ignored this.

On Tuesday, threats to forest defenders escalated when an Environment Centre spokesperson was run off the road by a log truck. The truck driver swerved at the young woman and her 4 year old daughter in a calculated threat. It was one of a series of violent incidents in the past week: protesters have had machinery driven at them, threats of sexual violence have been hurled and protesters have been assaulted by loggers. A new tree-sit structure has gone up, as the fight continues to protect the forest and its ecosystems from being wiped out, all for the sake of woodchipping the timber to make cardboard.

*For updates see www.huon.org/weldvalley

HILL OF TARA-MAC?

Worried the Irish government had learnt from its Sassenach neighbour's bouts of infrastructural toupettes and were out to implement a transport policy more suited to a sustainable 21st Century? Relax; roaring into the wake of England's worst development mistakes of the past thirty years, they've been building motorways as fast as the European Union cash handouts roll in; since 1990 Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions have shot up 25%.

In fact, not happy with more mundane acts of environmental degradation, they're planning a four-lane motorway through the middle of the Tara / Skryne Valley, where it's due to pass by one kilometre away from the central complex of the Hill of Tara - once the seat of the High Kings of Ireland. Now a 50-acre heavily-lit interchange is planned, the land around which is already being bought up. The perfect backdrop for a landscape considered of global cultural and archaeological significance, now shortlisted for adoption by the World Monuments Watch, and also making it into the list of the 'World's 100 Most Endangered Sites'. The WMW will decide on Tara in June but, without sufficient protest, the road contract may be pushed through beforehand. Under a Public Private Partnership, preparatory work has already seen mass tree felling and the trashing of an ancient burial site. See www.tarawatch.org and www.myspace.com/hilloftara or come down to a demo outside the Irish Embassy, 17 Grosvenor Place, 1pm, Sat 3rd March - just walk south from Hyde Park Corner tube.

ESOL-IDARITY

The government spin machine was at max rpm last September, as power-desperate Gordon Brown announced to the Labour Party Conference that immigrants must learn to speak English, declaring: "If we are to uphold these values that matter most, we need not only respect for all traditions but also a common language..." - and by values we assume he meant share values of the large corporations who will benefit most from an ever larger number of english-speaking, cheap, uncomplaining migrant labour in the job market. Still, despite their obviously selfish motives, a pledge to give more migrants free language education can't be all bad, can it? It would surely help them get to grips with living here, deal with the insane state bureaucracy and promote social inclusion...?

Well, as always with Neo Labour, the truth comes out in the wash - in January the Department Against Education slashed funding for the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme. This will mean the removal of universal entitlement to free ESOL training up to level 2 and that fee exemption will only be available to people already receiving benefits and tax credits - leaving many EU migrants and asylum seekers stuffed. Just how you'll be able to negotiate the minefields of benefit/tax credit forms, or earn the surplus cash to pay for your course on the kind of sub-minimum wages available to non-English speakers is a classic catch-22 question.

Around fifty organisations are fighting the cuts. Led by the University & College Union (academics not just sitting back taking notes?!), a week of action to Save ESOL begins on 26 February and includes:

Wed 28 Feb: Lobby of Parliament from 10am. Contact: jharris@ucu.org.uk or 0191 4877220

Sat 3 Mar: Demonstration in Newcastle alongside TCAR (Tyneside Community Action for Refugees), students and ESOL staff. Meet 11am at Centre for Life, Times Sq, Newcastle NE1 4EP. March to Civic Centre, rally at the Monument from 12noon. Details & online petition: www.ucu.org.uk

STING IN THE TAILBACK

A massive, over-zealous police presence did all the work for Camp for Climate Action activists in Sheffield last Monday (19th). They had intended to protest the continuing expansion of the M1 (the government plan to widen 23 miles of the motorway through Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, at a cost of a cool £340 million) but called everything off when they were met with ridiculous police demands about designated areas where the demo could take place.

For some reason the old Bill found it hard to get the connection between road expansion and climate change, mis-identifying them as the No to M1 Widening campaign (www.nowideningm1.org.uk - splitters!) In any event, the subsequent build up of cop vans on the road caused a massive tailback, sort of making the protesters' point, so everyone went home for tea. www.climatecamp.org.uk
* Road Block has merged with Transport 2000 to create a new super road-crime fighting team - see www.roadblock.org.uk for details.

Bunfight at the UK Corral

BNP leader Nick Griffin got a sweet and creamy reception in Horsham yesterday (22nd). Locals enraged by the BNP's attempt to foist Fascism on Sussex, plastered him and his bonehead entourage with cream buns. It wasn't all party cakes, though, one protester was brought down and Griffin proved his rep by repeatedly kicking him on the floor. Nick himself was soon also down for the count, but the fact remains that the BNP's central policy is to use violence against those already down. Interested in making the south a no-go area for Fascists? Contact antifasouth@hotmail.co.uk

THE HIT FACTORY

'Students against EDO' staged an early morning blockade of Brighton arms manufacturer EDO MBM (see SchNEWS 535) on Monday. Seven activists locked themselves to the gate and fence, preventing the workforce entering for over an hour. When an angle-grinder was found to cut a section of the fence away, most of the staff (at least those skinny enough to squeeze through the gap) trooped off to start work. One worker bemused protesters with the information, 'We don't think about what we do - we just switch off - it's people like you that make us think' (but seemingly not too long and hard).

After interrupting deliveries for half the day, the students unlocked themselves, 'because they had a lot of essays on'. However, Brighton's most arrestable citizen Chris Osmond found himself behind bars once again in an increasingly familiar trip to Hollingbury Nick.

A spokesman for the students said, "This is part of a continuous campaign to highlight the fact that every year nearly £1 billion is given to the arms companies; money which would be better invested in schools and universities. We believe that, in the face of 655,000 dead in Iraq as a result of the Anglo-American invasion, radical actions are needed to resist the US and UK's illegal wars. Students feel that they cannot sit by whilst spending on education is cut and defence spending keeps rising..."

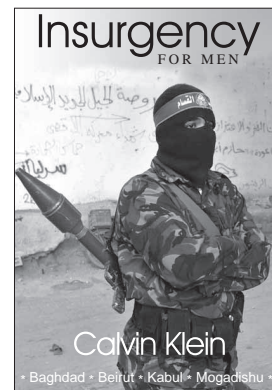
* For more info: www.smashedo.org.uk

SchNEWS in brief

Following on from last weeks report about protests to stop the gas pipeline going across Wales (See SchNEWS 576), the protest camp within the **Brecon National Park** are calling out for urgent help to prevent trees from being felled very near their camp. The pipeline is due to go for 30 miles through the national park destroying ancient forests along the way. While other areas are in immanent danger, protesters need help in Brecon now at the camp 4 miles west of Brecon on the A40 - for map and details see www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/02/361303.html ** **Salisbury's Grade 2 listed 18th Century 'Secret Garden'** is to be demolished so that the council can build a new glass office! The council are coming in any day now to cut the 150 year old trees and pull down the Victorian fountain. An URGENT call out for help has been made. tel: 07790418023 email: savethesecretgarden@hotmail.co.uk

...and finally...

Had enough of High St BO-bashers? Is Lynx Tempest (pour homme) not enough to cover the stench of your righteous radicalism? One enterprising individual has designed a perfume especially for the anti-government protesters camping in the centre of Lebanon's capital. 'Resistance' aftershave comes with a picture



of a sinking Israeli warship, is rose-scented and stands up to the shower-deprived life in the camp. It retails at \$1 a vial and 15,000 have been sold already. SchNEWS sniffs a market opportunity here and plans to launch Hizbollah'n'hers scents, 'Beirut 33' and 'Old Spies'...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - don't pine for a solution to climate change, join the poplar revolution. Honest!

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