

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER OVERWORKED, UNPAID...

WEEKLY

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 14th December 2007

Free/Donation

Issue 614

WORKING STINKS

REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT NOW JUST A MONEYSPINNER FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Speaking to his business backers at the latest Confederation of British Industry annual conference, Gordon Brown told his audience that it was time to make training mandatory for all benefit claimants.

"There are too many people on benefit," says Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (DWP), Peter Hain. And with cuts to disability benefits and child benefit for lone parents, Neo Labour are old hands when it comes to screwing the poor.

Whilst training may be good for some people seeking work, its also a real money spinner for the private companies making millions by forcing the poor into dead end menial McJobs. And what ever happened to the right NOT to work, anyway?

One such company is Working Links. Established in 2000, Working Links was set up to work in the government's new 'Employment Zones'. These were areas where poverty and long-term unemployment were at their worst. But rather than offer locals decent jobs with a living wage, Working Links have, instead, taken shedloads of tax-payers money to bully people into minimum wage jobs - sometimes even offering jobseekers cash-in-hand incentives to go to interviews.

And it's not just company bosses or shareholders who benefit from booting the 'workshy' into jobs - a Working Links employee can earn a hefty bonus if they decide to be particularly persuasive one month.

Working Links ownership is split four ways between the DWP, Mployment Limited, Manpower plc and CapGemini plc. Mployment is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mission Australia - a bible-bashing outfit which is rolling out a right-wing welfare reform programme down-under. To work for Mission Australia staff-members are required to read Matthew chapter 25 verse 35 ("I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me..." - in case you were wondering).

Mission employees are no strangers to tough welfare policies in a country where Ross Cameron, the former Liberal MP for Parmatta said that he was "against the welfare state on humanitarian and religious grounds. The early church had welfare, but it was also tough - Paul said 'Whoever does not work, does not eat.'"

By promising to send more people on training schemes, organisations like Working Links are pulling down some serious money. £4m profit in 2006, to be exact. Although profits were down to less than

a million quid in 2007, this was mainly because of the recruitment of a new 'sales team'. Turnover's up 15% and the business won 43 new contracts generating another £6m during the year. The government says that it is determined to 'grow the value of the business as measured by sustainable economic profit', and in this spirit shareholders received a dividend payment of £300,000. Proving that you can make money by pushing people off benefits and into work, Working Links can make nearly three grand for every Incapacity Benefit claimant it gets into a job for at least 13 weeks. Nice little earner!

Business-friendly Brown is promising more and more schemes which must be driving investors wild. Next year Incapacity Benefit will be replaced by the Employment and Support Allowance. 'Customers' who don't agree take part in work-focused interviews or take up training 'opportunities' will lose £11 a week for the first refusal, a penalty that doubles if they refuse to toe the line a second time.

Companies like Working Links stand to pick up more contracts as the government considers proposals to cut the benefits of lone parents (with kids over 11) who fail to look for work. There'll be more 'intensive mentoring' of claimants which suggests that Working Links may be putting that new sales team to work phoning jobseekers up at home

URANIUM ON THEIR PARADE

It doesn't really matter how nasty the weapons may be - big bangs are big business. And nothing's more insidious than depleted uranium (DU). Used on a massive scale in the Middle East, these weapons have caused widespread cancers and birth defects in countries such as Iraq and Afganistan.

There is also evidence that the use of DU has led to long term ill health for many service personnel, including "Gulf War syndrome".

DU is mainly used in anti tank shells which create millions of particles of radioactive metals which contaminate the battlefield (the whole of Iraq) for millions of years. Classified as a weapon of mass destruction by the United Nations, it's a favourite tool in the war against terror being pursued by the US and its lap dogs in the UK government. The multi-billion dollar companies that make DU are backed by a range of financial institutions across the globe.

In the US, companies such as Alliant Techsystems (ATK), GenCorp and General Dynamics are being backed by big banks, among them the Bank of New York, Goldman Sachs, General

SANTA UPGRADES SLEIGH AFTER SHARE DIVIDEND WINDFALL



CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For being a wallflower...

Colin West, one of the Preston Road tree campaigners in Brighton (see www.roughmusic.org.uk/rm16.html#1 for background), was sitting with mates on a wall outside an empty office building just up from the camp, when eagle-eyed cops swooped and arrested him and his mates on suspicion of theft - from an empty building, apparently!

This is just the latest in a series of police aggro targeting the camp - Colin's partner Sandra was nicked for the missing Steve Overt statue in September despite being unable to lift a pallet, let alone a half ton piece of metal...

with the occasional 'outreach visit' to boot.

And its onwards and upwards as at the end of November, Working Links landed a contract to run a new welfare-to-work programme in Chile. "The problems facing Chilean workers are similar to those of the UK unemployed," according to Working Links managing director, Keith Faulkner - boring jobs, low pay presumably? Another profiteering company is the Careers Development Group. They've set themselves up as a charity and in a speech to Brighton & Hove Business Forum, told local businesses that "CDG could be used by local businesses to source enthusiastic, skilled workers at no cost." Bargain!

Remember kids, as famous US union leader Lane Kirkland said, "If hard work were such a wonderful thing, surely the rich would have kept it all to themselves." (OK, we looked that one up on the internet...)

Electric and Barclays Bank. The Royal Bank of Scotland (which also owns Natwest) was a member of a 19-strong banking consortium that agreed credit worth £250m to ATK. They are the world's largest supplier of ammunition and keep profits rolling by flogging 1.5 billion rounds each year, with DU weapons being exported to Greece, South Korea, Turkey, Taiwan, Thailand and Kuwait. Barclays has 5% of the shares in Gencorp and 3% of the shares in ATK.

In 1994, a fire at Gencorp's Jannesborough factory led to the release of DU uranium into the atmosphere. Its former Aerojet testing ground at Chino Hills, California, is not only contaminated with DU, but also mustard, nerve and tear gas.

The International Coalition to Ban Depleted Uranium Weapons is calling for action against these low life investors and is running a disinvestment campaign to persuade high street banks to pull out of their deadly investments. You can download an activist kit and find out more about the campaign at www.bandeduranium.org/en/a/143.html

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

Copyright
Published in Brighton since 1994

ROOT'N'BRANCH LINE

Just down the road from the SchNEWS Plaza, residents in Hove are busy fighting Network Rail over the destruction of their local railway embankment.

The private sector company in charge of track maintenance has a national policy of cutting and poisoning trees, claiming that they only clear diseased or dangerously located trees. Apparently, using the toxic herbicide, 'Round-up' (which faces an EU ban from parks and other public open spaces in 2008) kills "woody re-growth, while encouraging the development of grasses to help stabilise erosion."

As ever with private companies with their eyes fixed firmly on the balance sheet, the green-sounding friendly claims turn out to be downright lies. One SchNEWS correspondent on a protest with the Save The Trees campaigners in late November witnessed perfectly healthy trees being cut down. Poisoning the roots destabilises the whole embankment and leads to subsidence, as Millie Ferguson, Save the Trees coordinator explains, "This is a short sighted, cost-cutting measure. If Network Rail coppiced the trees, there would be no problem. It is the local ecology that suffers and there is danger of landslips as the roots which keep the soil intact are killed."

She's backed up by Sussex University archaeologists who say the chalk base of these particular embankments make the tree cutting doubly dangerous and there have already been documented cases of landslips further north on the line at Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath following cutting and poisoning.

To stop future protests Network Rail have erected a 7ft chain-link fence - which has already been damaged by some naughty little Christmas pixies. Why not drop Network Rail Chairman Ian McAllister a seasonal greeting and let him know what you think by emailing his secretary: joan.blake@networkrail.co.uk

SchNEWS in Brief

On Monday (10th) protesters blockaded the Mexican embassy and consulate in London in a solidarity action with Zapatista communities. Wearing Zapatista red bandannas, activists draped a 'Stop the Repression' banner over the front entrance of the embassy. After a bit of rough and tumble with the Met, demonstrators were moved onto the other side of the road where a noisy protest ensued. "The Mexican state is aiding paramilitary groups who are launching violent attacks on Zapatista villages," says Esther McDonald of the UK Zapatista Solidarity Network "This demo shows that people all round the world are prepared to act in solidarity with the Zapatistas' struggle for autonomy." More at www.mexicosolidarity.org

*** Despite the rain 10,000 people turned out for the climate march and rally at the US embassy in London on Saturday (8th).** UK based marches took place in Cardiff and Glasgow with demonstrations across the world ahead of the Climate Inaction meeting in Bali.

*** A court in Bangalore, India has issued an alarming order for the 'arrest without the possibility of bail' of seven campaigners,** over their websites' postings about the awful labour conditions of an Indian supplier of fashion label G-Star. The activists are from the Clean Clothes Campaign and the India Committee of the Netherlands, with the director of their Netherlands-based Internet Service Provider also named.

The case could have implications for activists posting anything on the web, with the court

WORKING ON THE CHAIN GANG

Why tackle the underlying causes of crime when you can just lock people up? Whilst it might seem obvious that the 37 grand a year currently spent on each individual residing under Her Majesty's pleasure would be better spent reducing the poverty experienced by many of those who get banged up, UK plc begs to differ. Particularly when the prisons are privatised and there's some easy cash to be made, especially those in the business of using cheap prison labour.

Last week Neo Labour announced that it would be building three new 'super prisons' (to be called 'Titans') each capable of housing 2,500 inmates. The plan is to lock away 100,000 people by 2010 - up 60% since 1996. And no wonder - 3,000 more criminal offences have hit the statute book in less than a decade, so there's plenty more people breakin' the law! A million and a half people are found guilty of some offence or other each year and 130,000 enter the prison system. Even with plans to 'moderate the demand for custody', the government reckons another 20,000 places will be needed in the next three years. On average there are 125 prisoners per 100,000 people in the world, but the UK puts away 148 and our inmate population is rising faster than the US's (although by locking up six times the world average, and even more than the Chinese, the US is still out there in a league of its own).

So who gets locked up? One quarter of the prison population are from minority ethnic communities, although they represent less than 9% of the general population. Half of inmates suffer mental ill health and one in five have been homeless at some time. Foreign nationals account for more than one in ten inmates - but most of them are not included in the 2010 target as the Home Office plans some mass deportations in the next

few years. And, of course, there's the political prisoners. People who face years in prison for breaking the law whilst fighting a system that creates poverty, division and destroys the planet in the process.

More than 90% of recorded crime is against property and a third of prisoners are inside for non-payment of fines. So naturally it's the poor who inevitably get banged up, usually for hindering the rich in the quest to get just that bit richer. And just where do the rich end up when they've been caught in the boardroom, committing crimes on an much grander scale? - it's a short stay at Ford Open prison and weekend golfing retreats for you! And why not keep up with your share portfolio too, while your fellow inmates in more austere prisons work for next to no money...

The Forced Labour Convention of 1930 describes forced labour as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily," - yet that's exactly what happens in the prison service (see SchNEWS 525). Through the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme, inmates get to wear their own clothes, receive more visits and can earn more cash if they embrace the regime. And when the wage is often less than £2.50 a day, there are plenty of companies out there which are only too willing to employ a captive worker. You can find out who they are by visiting www.againstprison-slavery.org. Check out www.brightonabc.org.uk for ways you can support prisoners and info on latest campaigns. There are lists of Earth Liberation prisoners at www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk/addresses.html and vegan prisoners at www.vpsg.org. For more on alternatives to prison see www.alternatives2prison.uk.com.

Party & Protest listings, updated weekly, at www.schnews.org.uk/pap

using the Convention on Cyber Crime to call for extradition (SchNEWS expects a knock on the door any day now...) The case has been running for some time now. As the legal threats get worse the campaign are asking for solidarity. G-Star is the only remaining buyer from the manufacturer highlighted for its labour rights violations, so they are an obvious target. In the UK, No Sweat! have called a picket of G-star focusing on their Covent Garden store. For more see www.nosweat.org

SMASH EDO TOUR 2008

For nearly four years the Smash EDO campaign have been demonstrating outside EDO/MBM the local US arms manufacturers in Brighton. In 2008 the campaign will be touring the UK (or beyond) and will be screening the new full length Smash EDO SchMOVIES film - 'On The Verge' at every possible venue. Initially the campaign is looking for dates in March/April 2008.

The tour will give those involved in the campaign to discuss tactics, get feedback, and organise for the future. If you want the tour to come to your town or city contact: on-the-verge@hotmail.co.uk

To view the On The Verge trailer visit:

www.smashedo.org.uk or
www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies

...and finally...

After a man who worked at Sellafield nuclear processing plant was nicked this week - when police found a homemade bomb at his home - you might have expected to see his grainy mugshot in the newspapers under headlines such as "Worker at Nuclear Power Station Had Bomb", "A-Bomb Terror Plot" or "Nuclear Nut-job."

You might have thought that the tabloids running short of yet more speculation about missing toddler Madleine McCann, would love to try to scare us into buying a paper. The problem is that the guy in question isn't a muslim or even dark skinned, so he doesn't fit the government's, polices' or newspapers' stereotype of a "dangerous terrorist".

Darren Morris was arrested on suspicion of possessing an explosive substance with intent to endanger life. He's already been released on bail - what, not banged up for 28 days without charge? The police said without a hint of irony that there was "no risk to the general public" - er, why did you nick him then???

This is similar to the case of Robert Cottage, a member of the BNP, who had the largest amount of chemical explosives of its type ever found in the country, which barely registered in the mainstream media (see SchNEWS 564) - he only got two and a half years in prison and never got close to being referred to as a terrorist!

* Look out for the 2008 Oxford dictionary's revised definition of 'terrorism': (noun) an act of political violence carried out by swarthy looking people, preferably Islamic ones with exotic sounding names...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers -we're finished...for this year. Back in early 2008. Honest!

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk