



WAKE UP!! WAKE UP!! IT'S YER KEENLY OBSERVED...

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AS THE OBSERVER TROTS OUT POLICE LINE OVER ECO-TERRORISM

"Of course I don't have a fucking agenda. I'm a national newspaper journalist - why would I have an agenda?" - Mark Townsend, Observer journalist.

The *Observer* launched a broadside this week against the environmental movement. Headlined "Police warn of growing threat from eco-terrorists" - handily sub-headed, "Fear of deadly attack by lone maverick as officers alert major firms to danger of green extremism" - the article goes on to allege that "Officers are concerned that a 'lone maverick' eco-extremist may attempt a terrorist attack aimed at killing large numbers of Britons." Of course not one shred of evidence is referred to in the thinly disguised puff-piece for the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU). The words of an unnamed police source are all it takes to generate the spectre of carbon-neutral suicide bombings coming to a city-centre near you.

Apparently, "The unit is currently monitoring blogs and internet traffic connected to a network of UK climate camps and radical environmental movements under the umbrella of Earth First! ... A senior source at the unit said it had growing evidence of a threat from eco-activists. 'We have found statements that four-fifths of the human population has to die for other species in the world to survive. There are a number of very dedicated individuals out there and they could be dangerous to other people.'"

The piece was written by one Mark Townsend (environmental journalist of the year and co-incidentally author of a mildly-amusing tome entitled "Fifty ways to fuck the planet") and the mysterious Nick Denning, who doesn't even work at the *Observer*.

When SchNEWS contacted Mark at his desk, at first he seemed defensive and grew increasingly aggressive as the interview went on. When asked if he'd just regurgitated a police press release he said, "You don't know anything about NETCU mate - they don't just stick out press releases". Which is strange given that the unit comment very publicly on the work they do - just check out their website www.netcu.org.uk for a few examples of the spin they put on stories involving protestors. They also don't disguise their political purpose. As it says on their site, "We support the business and academic sectors, providing a centralised source of information, advice, guidance and liaison on strategies to withstand domestic extremist attacks."

Now baby-eating anarchist scare-stories are nothing new in the world of the left liberal media. Anyone remember the samurai sword-wielding nihilists it was reported were going to be at large on Mayday 2001 - not to mention the swathes of fiction released around

the time of the Gleneagles G8 (see SchNEWS 503). More recently of course we had the much publicised discovery of a 'weapons cache' near this year's Climate Camp. As far as the political police are concerned the media are just another weapon in the fight against domestic unrest - and for their journalist-dupes truth balance and fact-checking just don't come into it. When we asked Mark where the claim that Earth First! advocates the disappearance of 80% of the population had come from he said, "I don't know - they [NETCU] said they had seen them in blogs" - How's that for speaking truth to power?

So why the sudden appearance of the article? It contains little that could be described as news, just a load of cobbled together wild-eyed speculation. One answer is that concern for NETCU jobs in the face of the credit crunch has triggered a search for a new enemy and a broader remit. How convenient that now the animal rights (AR) movement is in 'disarray', a new target hovers into view.

OFF WITH HIS SUBHEAD

Another possible explanation is that the growing movement against climate change has got the state more worried than we realise, and the idea is to spread fear amongst activists that they are being heavily watched. At the moment campaigners are generally regarded in a positive light and public support is absolutely crucial for successful defiance of the state. Just look at how lightly anti-GM activists and peace protestors are treated by the authorities compared to their animal rights counterparts. Perhaps the time has come to drive a wedge between environmental activists and the general public, and of course the best way to do this is with the emotive issue of 'violence'. Are we *observing* the beginning of a smear campaign?

So far it's AR that has felt the full weight of state-orchestrated demonisation. Despite the fact that the movement has never been responsible for a single death they are routinely described as 'terrorists' or 'extremists'. A political climate has been created which enables the state to crack down hard. New criminal offences are drafted targeting the movement and people are imprisoned simply for organising demos (Sean Kirtley - see SchNEWS 634). The SOCPA legislation (sec 145) banning demos aimed at disrupting 'contractual obligations' currently only protects 'animal research' organisations. A who's who of UK media organisations have lined up to take a pop at the AR movement - Dispatches, Panorama and all



the main papers have parroted the police line that AR is full of dangerous violent fanatics with an irrational belief system. High profile waves of arrests make the front page, so do the convictions, but news of acquittals languish in the back pages. The actual cause that the AR movement is fighting for receives virtually no media examination. The industrial-scale use of animals for food and vivisection is one of the great hidden evils of our lifestyle - rather than confront that, it's obviously best to throw those that confront it into prison.

The opening of the new Oxford animal lab, albeit two years late and millions over budget, is now being hailed as a victory by vivisectionists. Of course the very fact that they were able to achieve this much is because of a huge mobilisation on the part of the state. Back in SchNEWS 590 we described how Thames Valley Police accidentally taped themselves saying that they were 'going to wage a dirty war' against SPEAK, with one commander adding that, "We're going to prosecute the shit out of them." Publicity surrounding the tape didn't prevent the arrest and prosecution of Mel Broughton, a prominent spokesperson for the campaign (see SchNEWS 616). Last week he was acquitted of possessing an explosive substance - packets of sparklers - with intent. Two other charges led to hung jury.

Despite this, the prosecution demanded a retrial and Mel was remanded in prison with a trial date to be fixed 'some time next year'. NETCU's attempts to take 'ringleaders' of the AR off the streets by fair means or foul continues.

We don't know what agenda Townsend's actually working to but it's been clear for a while that the police want an increased ability to deal with all forms of dissent. Public demonisation is a key plank in the strategy. We'll leave the last words to John Curtin, long term AR campaigner: "We used to be regarded as Robin Hood figures for what we did - rescuing animals from a life of torture in laboratories - and now we're terrorists - the same people doing the same things."

* Original article is at www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/nov/09/eco-terrorism-earth-first-elf

** NETCU Watch www.netcu.wordpress.com

LACK CLUSTER EXCUSE

On the morning of October 1st, 2006, a group of activists broke into the Lakenheath air base. Having monitored Israeli jets on their way to Lebanon they became aware of the presence of cluster bombs - the recorded victims of which are 98% civilian - at the US military base in Suffolk.

Aware also that the MOD has no jurisdiction on US bases - in fact they're not even allowed to enter without what's known as a 'Bloody Good Reason' - they decided to cut their way through the fences and chain themselves to the gates of the Special Munitions Store to prevent the cluster bombs (or any other explosive) being loaded onto waiting F-15s destined for the Middle East.

They then rang the MOD to inform them that war crimes were taking place and encouraged them to pop over and take a look.

Two years on and they are now preparing to stand trial at Ipswich Crown Court having been prosecuted under SOCPA section 128, as well as for criminal damage.

SOCPA, the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, first came into action in 2005 (see SchNEWS 483 and every t'other week since) and the 'Lakenheath 8' were among the first to be prosecuted under it.

While admitting to being pleasantly surprised at

becoming officially designated 'seriously organised', spokeswoman and accused Mel Harrison was rather less enamoured with the label criminal. Section 128 refers to trespassing on certain sites designated by the Secretary of State - sometimes royally-owned Crown land or places chosen in the interests of 'national security'. The maximum sentence is a year in the nick and a £5000 fine.

Fortunately it doesn't state whose national security it should be in the interest of - and many of the designated sites are US military bases. The official reason for this is to protect them from terrorist attack, however, as Harrison points out, terrorists generally willing to blow themselves to little pieces for the cause are unlikely to be deterred by the threat of a year in jail and a fine. Instead, in Harrison's opinion, the real targets of the legislation appear to be peace activists.

Given the recent victories in court for protesters successfully using the 'Stopping War Crimes' defence, (see SchNEWS 589, 646 on how King'snorth climate campaigners and the B52 Two - who broke into RAF Fairford in March 2003 - won their cases), it will be interesting to see how the Lakenheath defendants fair when the trial begins on the first of December...

* See also www.lakenheathaction.org

A BRUM DO

After Birmingham's County Court granted an eviction notice, a protest camp named the 'Councillor John Lines Homeless Village' has been forced to up-sticks and move to a new site er, fifty metres away. The camp, named after the council's housing chief, was called to highlight the chronic need for housing in the city.

There are currently 30,000 people in Birmingham waiting for housing. John Lines, who faced a disciplinary hearing earlier this year after describing asylum seekers as "scumbags", has denied there is a homeless problem in the city and claims the council doesn't have the money to build new 'social' housing. However, the council continues to hold onto land which could be sold cheaply to housing associations, hoping to sell the assets to the highest commercial bidders instead.

Housing Associations can draw a grant of up to £100 million for buying up social housing and, as one protester pointed out, "At £50,000 per unit, that £100m could provide around 2,000 homes." - but that's too easy when commercial development profits are dangled.

The new site is at the start of Pershore Road (city end), and visitors showing solidarity are welcome. Campers have also asked for blankets, food and donations.

* See visit www.justicenotcrisis.wordpress.com

X-RAY OF HOPE

Obama and his transition team are drawing up plans to close Guantánamo. Brilliant news, long overdue, but let's not get carried away. Instead of trying current detainees in US criminal courts, there is speculation that a new court will be designed specially to handle "sensitive national security cases". This would purposely relax standards and restrict defence and public access to classified evidence.

Closing Guantánamo should in theory uncover the despicable practices carried out at the facility as well as in the US's strategic secret prisons in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. There is, however, little mention of how Obama plans to curtail the outsourcing of torture and extraordinary rendition - as experienced by UK resident and Ethiopian national Binyam Mohamed. He languishes in Gitmo, with charges against him based on confessions extracted using torture (see SchNEWS 638). Binyam worked in London as a janitor and was captured in Pakistan in April 2002. It is alleged that he was connected to a plot to detonate a radioactive 'dirty bomb' in a US city.

Binyam, Brighton resident Omar Deghayes, and the majority of inmates in Guantánamo were actually caught by bounty-hunters as they fled into Pakistan from Afghanistan after the US invasion in 2001. At the time the US military were handing out cash rewards for every 'terrorist' handed in.

This will be one of the first tests of Obama's resolve, as we see whether the detainees will be given a fair legal process, humanitarian protection, and if appropriate, asylum in a suitable country. Call us cynical but the move to close Guantánamo works well as PR to convince the world of America's new found humanity, but Gitmo is just the tip of an iceberg and much of what else goes on happens much less visibly. Since many of Obama's new administration are well to the right of him, it may be too optimistic that those responsible for war crimes will be held accountable.

* See www.andyworthington.co.uk and www.redpepperobamablog.blogspot.com

CLARION UP THE ARMS FAIR

Santas, reindeers and elves protested at Clarion Event's 'Spirit of Christmas Fair' in London last week, to expose Clarion's involvement with the international arms trade. Leaflets detailing this and placards reading, 'Bells not bombs,' diverted shoppers from their frenzy of consumerism.

Clarion, one of the UK's largest events companies, expanded into the lucrative defence and security sector this year, taking over five arms fairs: Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEi)*, Latin American Aerospace and Defence, ITEC and undersea defence exhibitors UDT-Europe and UDT-Asia Pacific.

Meanwhile the Baby Show, another Clarion Event, saw a backlash last month as sponsors Bounty (makers of Huggies nappies), withdrew from the exhibition and Unicef refused to accept donations from the ticket sales after Clarion's links with the arms trade became evident.

Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) are targeting Clarion Events, with spokesperson Symon Hill saying, "It is beyond satire for a company to celebrate the 'Spirit of Christmas' while making profits from the arms trade. Clarion's bosses seem to be the only people who don't find it absurd."

* DSEi is one of the world's largest arms fairs, held every other September at the ExCel Centre in East London (See SchNEWS 604, 321). The last time saw 1,352 exhibitors flogging weapons to warwongers from over 40 countries - and the usual round of protests, the most memorable being in 2001 when it was the same day as 9-11. The next one will be Sept 8th-11th 2009 (see www.dsei.org). CAAT are holding regular musical demos at the ExCel Exhibition Centre, Off Custom House DLR Station, with one on November 22nd 1pm-4pm. elaaf@hotmail.co.uk or see www.caat.org.uk

...and finally... Porridge Otis

David Hodgkiss into withholding incriminating evidence against Ferry and threatening to discredit him as a 'disgruntled ex-employee'.

Ferry's mother is worried about him, saying that he "loves the outdoors so much"

- but he himself has countered this by claiming that prison is a walk in the park, likening it to boarding school (he went to Eton). He is quoted as saying "Contrary to popular belief, prison life is not tough, and in this namby-pamby society we even get our own televisions..." and - of his fellow inmates - "We don't have much in common. There are not many countrymen."

This week he was due to have a bail hearing, but for some reason his barrister withdrew his move for bail - probably because it didn't have a leg to stand on. So, it'll be a glorious Gloucester Prison lunch for Christmas then...

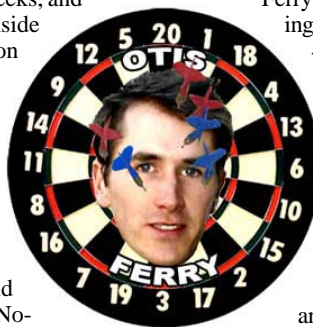
Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - don't take our word for any of it. Honest!

Things just go from bad to worse for spoiled brat Otis Ferry. The rabidly pro-hunt Z-list celeb (his dad was in something called Roxy Music) has been on remand for eight weeks, and this could stretch out to being inside for six months - until his trial on March 9th 2009.

While his Tory MP and brother are laughingly calling him a 'political prisoner' for his opposition to the Fox Hunting ban, this is hardly a case for Amnesty International.

He is in fact being prosecuted for attacking a hunt monitor and stealing their camera back in November 2007 (See SchNEWS 630), and on top of that attempting to noble a witness - perverting the course of justice - which hardly points to a clear conscience on Ferry's part. He is accused of intimidating former hunt groomsman



PARTY & PROTEST

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