



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER ROCK SOLID RADICAL...

# SchNEWS

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## FRACKING HELL

### AS SCHEWS DIGS DEEP TO EXPOSE CRACKS IN EXPLOSIVE ENERGY CRAZE

A few months since Fukushima, nearly a year since Deepwater Horizon but the global elite aren't resting on their laurels and it looks like we won't have to wait too long for the fossil fuel industry to cause the next environmental apocalypse. New kid on the block is the appropriately named 'fracking' – or, more explicitly: hydraulic fracturing, a method of extracting natural gas from shale rock layers thousands of feet deep – and its coming here soon.

Already causing waves of mass panic across the US, fracking is a technique that involves pumping huge quantities of water, sand and highly toxic chemicals into shale formations, then blowing it all sky high with explosives in order to fracture the rocks, stick a bore down and get to the fuel resource. This energy-intensive process results in vast amounts of radioactive waste 'water', earthquakes and subsidence in the areas around the mines, noxious chemicals being vented into the air, and causes significantly more CO2 emissions than conventional gas extraction.

### IT'S ALL RIGGED

But it's all hands on the rig in the scramble for more 'homegrown' alternatives to Arab oil. The recent surge in fracking is largely due to changes in the US Energy Policy Act, pushed by Dick Cheney in 2005. Known as the 'Halliburton loophole', it exempted fracking wells from federal regulation under the Safe Drinking Act - letting energy companies pollute Americans' drinking water without having to be bothered by pesky government interference.

The fracturing fluid contains carcinogenic chemicals, such as benzene, and endocrine disruptors – compounds which can be blamed for a huge range of developmental problems such as birth defects, deformations of the body and sexual development problems. It's made radioactive by the presence of radium, and other naturally occurring hazardous chemicals such as arsenic and mercury, all brought to the surface through the extraction process. It's unclear exactly what goes into this noxious cocktail in the first place as the corporations using it are keeping conveniently schtum about their recipe and, despite Dow Chemical admitting to supplying antimicrobial poisons to go into the mix, no regulator is demanding disclosure from the gas miners.

Toxic sludge from over 71,000 wells is currently sitting in huge open storage tanks and leeching into the water table in Pennsylvania, Texas, Wyoming, Arkansas and other US states. The methane that the extractors are after is also seeping into underground aquifers, causing

one of the most visible polluting effects: the phenomena of inflammable water. Residents of Pennsylvania, some living up to 1km from mining operations, have water coming out of their taps that has such a high methane content it will actually burst into flames if a match is held near it. An accidental spill in the same state has killed trees and contaminated waterways, with one local explaining, "it's killed all the fish. [The pond] turns colours different times of the day. Now it's fluorescent orange."

Arkansas and Texas have seen unprecedented numbers of earthquakes since mining operations began. In six months Arkansas had over 1,000 earthquakes with more than a dozen registering over 3.0 on the Richter scale, 90% of which have all been within 6km of waste water disposal wells.

Not only is it polluted drinking water and unheard-of seismic activity, but air pollution in Texas has gone off the scale. Even considering the notoriously relaxed environmental quality standards in Texas, in some towns the carcinogen benzene is at levels 55 times higher than laws allow, and neurotoxicants xylene and carbon disulphide, and the blood poison naphthalene were found to be up to 384 times over the safe limits.

But don't worry, at least there's lots of cold hard cash involved. BP paid more than \$3billion for fracking rights in 2008, BHP Bilton spent \$5 billion on sites in Arkansas, and Shell have snapped \$4.7 billion's worth of assets in the Marcellus Shale formation in West Virginia and prime mining land in Pennsylvania. The Marcellus Shale is a formation the size of Greece, more than a mile underground, and valued at around \$2 trillion dollars. No wonder they're happy to pay out small change in reparations if needed, as Cabot Oil & Gas did recently when coughing up \$4 million in damages to 14 families in Dimock, Pennsylvania, and agreeing to replenish the water supply after a defective well-casing poisoned the drinking water.

### BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATI

Never one to be too far behind an ill-thought-out American blunder, the UK has eagerly embarked on a fracking frenzy of its own. Blackpool is now not only famous for sticks of rock, naughty postcards and the Pleasure Beach, but also the UK's first frack up. Cuadrilla Resources, a UK energy company, has started extracting methane from the Bowland shale formation 4,000 feet underground and less than four miles away from Blackpool Tower.

More sites are planned. Cuadrilla has a licence which covers most of Lancashire and is planning two more wells. In a recent government inquiry, potential areas for drilling in-

cluded the Weald - the area of the North and South Downs running through Hampshire, Surrey, Kent and Sussex; Cambrian Bay - an area stretching from central England into Wales; the length of the Pennines; and in the Cheshire area in the north-west. See <https://www.og.decc.gov.uk/upstream/licensing/shalegas.pdf> for a map of known shale formations in the UK, and where mining operations have found gas along them. Other energy companies Island Gas, Composite Energy and Nexes are also sniffing around for new wells.

Looking to the horizon, offshore reserves are ringing even more pound signs in the corporate world's eyes. Fracking in the sea is something that hasn't yet been explored by the energy industry's boardrooms, but the potential is massive compared to what could be extracted inland. According to Nigel Smith a Geophysicist from the British Geological Survey who gave evidence at the government inquiry, "There will not be any environmental problems there either, I would not say. As for the saline [waste] water, it depends how saline it is. Maybe you could just put it into the seawater." Anyone fancy a paddle?

Elsewhere, Shell are drilling wells. They have already drilled a shale gas well in Sweden, and there is a lot of drilling activity going to take place this year across the rest of Europe, and South Africa. China and India have also recently announced plans to search for shale deposits to extract methane.

Some communities have been rallying around to fight this terrifyingly polluting process. Thousands of people turned out to protest against planned operations in France last month, resulting in the French government becoming one of the first to ban fracking, despite being one of the most 'promising' territories for shale gas drilling in Europe, with extensive deposits in the south and in the area near Paris.

In the US, students and communities around the wells have been organising against the work of the gas companies, and the American government recently relaunched an inquiry into the environmental impact of fracking following widespread protest. A 2004 report gave fracking a clean bill of health, but the new inquiry is due to reconsider the verdict, but is only due to announce the results in 2013.

Meanwhile, drilling continues apace. One of the key issues is the total lack of knowledge around shale drilling and how the explosions can impact the bedrock. Each shale formation will have its own particular characteristics, and the possibility of blowing holes that will cause the waste fluid to pass into the water table is unknown. Each new well will need to be examined independently to determine the level of risk.

Until the potential polluting consequences are known it is obviously typical money-blinded lunacy to start blasting England's bedrock with radioactive and carcinogenic chemicals, in return for even more CO2 emissions. They should all fracking leave the well(s) alone.

**INFORMATION FOR ACTION**

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## GREECE NOT LIGHTENING

The anti-austerity fightback continued in Greece this week as a 24-hour strike called by the unions ended in violence on the streets. The strike was called in response to the government's new attempt at an austerity package designed to reduce the budget deficit, and ended in violent chaos.

The action on Wednesday (11th) was the latest episode after a months of riots (see SchNEWS 752), with multiple clashes between cops and an up-for-it public, sick of bearing the brunt of some of the toughest austerity measures in Europe, coupled with police brutality and oppression.

Apart from Athens, where five separate marches were making tracks in the city's suburbs, demonstrations took place in another thirteen major cities. Tens of thousands took to the streets in Athens alone.

There was a news blackout. Greek Indymedia was down for 24 hours; the Government had forced the site to shut down due to fears of incitement. The site has been under constant close scrutiny by the authorities for some time.

Dozens were injured. At least 3 protesters have undergone medical operations. Yiannis K, a 30-year-old attacked by police in Athens remains in a critical condition with two serious head injuries, and is still in a medically induced coma. He was assaulted by police whilst in a block, the attack unprovoked. The cops threw gas and stun grenades into the crowd whilst striking people with their batons. According to medical reports he was battered with an object that was not a police baton; sources from Greek Indymedia state it may have been a fire extinguisher. A statement was issued by Nikaia Hospital condemning police brutality and the Greek Government, bearing witness to the scores of citizens assaulted after justifiably reacting.

Villa Amalias, an anarchist squat in Athens, was attacked by police around 8pm local time. Events began to unfold when people in the squat realised there was a group of neo-nazis (40 strong) assailing migrants near by. They left the squat to aid the people being attacked. Clashes ensued and when police appeared they attempted to push the anarchists back to the Villa. In the early hours of Thursday (12th) a Bangladeshi migrant was assassinated. Mainstream media claim this was a fascist attack, at time of print this remains unconfirmed. One Pakistani family then had their house fire-bombed.

More fierce collisions - between antifascists and migrants on one side, and fascists and riot police on the other - then exploded across the capital on Thursday. There was another attempt by Nazis to strike Villa Amalias, but it was successfully defended. The riot police used tear gas to help the Nazis escape. As the Greek state is tightening its leash, ripple effects are hitting society and claiming innocent victims due to social problems created by the Government's measures.

Emergency anarchist assemblies were called for 6pm on the day of the General Strike to discuss police attacks and possible actions. Protesters occupied the University of Athens on Thursday morning and erected loudspeakers on the University square to inform people about police brutality and call for anti-police demonstrations. The building is to be a centre of information and a base of operations for counter actions.

\* There is a call out for solidarity action outside of Greece to take place between 13th-15th May.

### PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see  
[www.schnews.org.uk/pap](http://www.schnews.org.uk/pap)

## STAY ALIVE DONT DRIVE 55

Three ISM activists violently arrested last Sunday (1st) as 60 Israeli soldiers evicted a protest tent in the way of a planned fence through the village of Izbet al-Tabib. They were accused of being in a closed military zone - although no evidence was ever produced and the charges were then dropped as they were released from prison last Tuesday (3rd). Several other protesters were also injured, including a 60 year-old American woman who suffered a head injury that will require surgery.

Izbet al-Tabib is right next to highway 55 which connects illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Israelis say they are erecting the fence to prevent stones being thrown on to the highway, but it is being built a long way from the road and will annex a portion of the village's agricultural land. Villagers and international activists have been peacefully protesting its construction. The village has already lost 45% of their land due to the construction of Israel's Separation Barrier.

Effectively the Israelis are stealing more Palestinian land on the pretext of defending an illegally built road which serves illegal settlements built on the rich water aquifer of the West Bank. By getting beaten and arrested the activists have ensured this act is newsworthy (if only barely) to the wider world. But this type of imperial creep continues every day, backed up by the Israeli state and courts. No wonder the political standoff continues with Israel refusing to countenance dealing with any combined Fatah and Hamas union. For more see [palsolidarity.org](http://palsolidarity.org) and [jordanvalleysolidarity.org](http://jordanvalleysolidarity.org)

\* In other Palestinian news, the Israeli army fired on Palestinian and international activists at Erez Crossing in Beit Hanoun, Gaza on Tuesday (11th). They had been protesting against the 'buffer zone' but were forced to retreat by machine-gun fire. Although no one was injured, local resident Saber Al Zaaneen said that the Israelis "opened fire directly at the demonstrators". The 'buffer zone' is the distance Palestinians are allowed to be from the border - 50 metres in theory, but actually over a mile in many areas and, according to the United Nations, it "eats up 30% arable land".

## POLITICAL FOOTBALL

Legendary Argentinian midget coke-head and one time cheating football genius Diego Maradona just popped up in Chechnya of all places. He was there to captain a team of ex-international footballers in an exhibition match against a team lead by Chechen president, Ramzan Kadyrov.

Kadyrov has been ruling the Russian republic as an Islamic dictatorship, with the backing of the Kremlin, since 2007. His father Akhmad Kadyrov was also president until he was assassinated by his former rebel comrades in 2004. Although violence is much lower than during the Chechen Wars it has come at a price - civil rights activists are routinely "disappeared" and strict Islamic laws imposed on its populace.

Some of the posters of Kadyrov which swamp Grozny display the slogan, "Sport is our Power, Victory is our aim" - yet the visiting superstars somehow seemed blissfully unaware of their role, with (despite being a broadsheet journo) non-too-bright ex-England winger Steve McManamanaan saying "We're just here to play football... It's not a piece of propaganda for us." - er no, but it is for them Steve!

In case you wondered, the home side won 5-2 - helped by a surely unscripted hero's hat-trick by President Kadyrov himself. Fancy footwork. No word on how much Maradona & Co. were paid, or where the money came from though.

## HARDEST HIT PARADE

Thousands of people, including many disabled, carers and those with long-term health issues, marched in London on Wednesday (11th) to protest against the chaotic cuts to disability allowances and the skewed process for assessing ability to work that could force some of society's most vulnerable into unsuitable work - or poverty.

The 'Hardest Hit' march took place on the first anniversary of the Con-Dem government. The aim was to show the Coalition that it hasn't gone unnoticed that while the bankers carry on with their corrupt and greedy ways, the cuts imposed on the population have left disabled people en masse an estimated £374 million worse off. This has a knock-on effect on people's quality of life; the scrapping of the mobility component, for example, means those who rely on taxis to get out the house and socialise will be stuck indoors.

While Tory MPs repeat until they're er, blue in the face that the current system is "failing people" (read: it doesn't fit with their vision of a privatised lean, mean, small government machine), the message from the disabled masses was that it's the government who are failing people - and they won't get away with it.

## SchNEWS IN BRIEF

To remind the newly-swept into power Scottish National Party (SNP) of it's anti-Trident posturing, the **Trident submarine base in Faslane was blockaded** for two hours on Tuesday (10th), in a joint action by activists from Trident Ploughshares and Faslane Peace Camp. [www.tridentploughshares.org](http://www.tridentploughshares.org)

\*\* In what seems to have come as a surprise to the mainstream news, a former senior intelligence official has said that the famous '45 minutes' dossier which outlined the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and made the case for war, was designed to er, "make the case for war".

In a letter to the (absolutely-not-a-whitewash-this-time, honest gov') **Chilcot Enquiry**, Michael Laurie said he had been given the directions to do so, despite Alastair Campbell having said the complete opposite to Chilcot last year. So, in a double shocker it turns out a New Labour spin doctor is a liar - who'd of thunk it?

## ...and finally...

Reckon you're radical? Well watch your step 'cos apparently the term's trademarked. Organisers of the "Radical Media Conference" were shocked to receive a 'cease and desist' letter from American PR company called @radicalmedia LLC. They claimed that they owned the term 'radical media' and that any conference using the name would be "an infringement and passing off of @radical's valuable intellectual property rights."

Milan Rai, who received the legal letter on behalf of the conference, summed-up the organisers' response: "Our collective jaws dropped, how could anyone own an adjective? But, a legal fight could leave us tens of thousands of pounds down, money which - even if we had it - should be spent on more useful, more radical things than legal fees."

Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, the organisers of the conference, which include such street fightin' class warriors as Red Pepper and the New Internationalist decided to cave in and re-name themselves as the, ahem, Rebellious Media Conference.

Well here at SchNEWS we're not gonna back away from it - we're radical media and we're here to stay - so bring it on you suits and we'll hav'ya...

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