

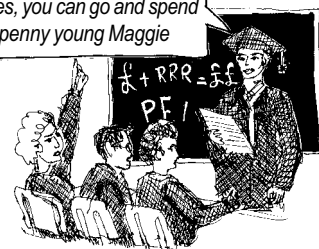


WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER BEHIND THE BIKE-SHED

SchNEWS

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Yes, you can go and spend a penny young Maggie



Friday 16th Febrewery 2001

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TEACHERS' PEST

"We need to change the law to allow external sponsors – from the business and voluntary sectors and from within the education world itself – to play a far greater role in the management of schools" - Tony Blair

"The market in Education Services is a fast expanding and exciting one. It represents excellent growth opportunities for our Company" - Nord Anglia

Big business was licking its lips this week after New Labour published another green paper on education. The main ingredient is that the government aims to turn half the country's comprehensives over as specialist schools by 2006, allowing schools to concentrate in one subject area. Good news? Well, David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers doesn't think so. He warned that the changes could lead to a market free-for-all.

Dunces

"Schools are the centre of a community. We get the reputation for being a good corporate citizen. But it's not an esoteric, holier-than-thou- thing. We're in business" Robert Halhead, NTL

"For failing schools, the government proposes a welcome dose of market discipline" - Financial Times

Unfortunately this 'market discipline' has already come a little unstuck. In January the National Audit Office published its study of the 25 Education Action Zones that have been operating around the country (see SchNEWS 226). This is the scheme where the government had the strange idea that business would give money to schools out of the goodness of their hearts (ok, aside from getting their brand names plastered all over the place and getting a say in the running of the schools).

Companies synonymous with education like Shell, British Aerospace, Rentokil and McDonalds joined in. Unfortunately it wasn't enough, and only half the expected two and a half million quid from business materialised and much of this wasn't cash but "services in kind" like 'strategic advice' charged at imaginary rates.

The government meanwhile poured nearly £19 million of taxpayers money into the project. The Audit Office discovered

that "some zones were spending large sums of public money before they had sound financial controls in place, creating risk of poor accounting, impropriety or poor value for money."

In fact, only a few zones exceeded their "targets" – notably Newham and Southwark in London. These are handily close to parliament and include companies like PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Arthur Andersen and Capita, who are all hoping that their generosity will result in some juicy government contracts in the future.

Still, who cares about a silly little report: 14 more zones are to be created.

Could Do Better

In the New Labour everything-must-go world, outsourcing is one of the buzz words etched on the blackboards of the corporate classroom. Outsourcing means privatisation but we don't want any old fashioned words like that getting in the way of our story.

Top of the class outsourcing companies will turn their hand to anything from recruiting teachers to organising payrolls, ordering stationery and IT supplies, and maintaining classrooms. Last month the Department of Education and Employment said that 20 local education authorities had either contracted out their back office functions or were doing so. Firms like WS Atkins, who recently agreed to generously provide the London borough of Southwark with virtually all its education services – including building maintenance, payroll, hiring teachers and purchasing. The City is also catching on that this is a growth sector. Investors Chronicle recently said it expected Nord Anglia's profits to "grow at more than 30 per cent over the next two years", while another investment firm reckons the 'sector' will grow from £1.6 billion today to £5 billion within five years.

But it's not all been plain sailing. Haringey council, parents and governors recently rejected for the second time two bids to take over their "failing local education authority". One bid was from the Ensign consortium which includes Group 4 whose experience in managing privatised prisons presumably makes them an ideal candidate to run New Labour's schools!

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

A pensioner, a schoolboy, a care worker and a middle aged housewife were arrested and charged with harassment of B & K Universal Ltd, a company based in Hull, who breed animals for vivisection. The charges included - and we're not making this up - "holding a placard, making obscene gestures with an inflatable champagne bottle, sending a birthday card", and the best one "staring at a building!"

Coming top of the class in this story however, just so happens to be consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers who 'helped' the borough to prepare for the scheme and clocked up bills that run into millions. No one will say exactly how much because the information is, of course, confidential.

All this is just the tip of the iceberg. As Christopher Draper from the anarchist paper Freedom points out, "If schools were being liberated from state-control and handed over to co-operatives of pupils, parents and teachers we would have something to celebrate but these sell-offs provide the worst of both worlds."

For big business however every new education twist gives them an opportunity to make a profit from markets they could once only have wet dreams about.

SIEMEN STAINS

A new computer system which cost £77 million with the promise that it would deal with the backlog of asylum seeker claims has proved to be bogus and has been scrapped by the government. The computer system was handed over to Siemens under the Private Finance Initiative, and they promptly sacked staff and made the service even worse. Despite the National Audit Office complaining about their incompetence, Siemens received bonuses because they were paid for reducing costs *not* for improving the system!

The company have a fine record in privatisation cock ups, managing to paralyse the passport agency two years back. People missed holidays or had to queue in the rain to get their documents, while the cost rose to £28 to cover the fiasco (see SchNEWS 219).

PS: SchNEWS neither confirms or denies that it was Siemens who came in to look at our computers a couple of weeks back.

Positive SchNEWS

Human Scale Education are running a series of workshops around the country for anyone interested in setting up their own schools etc. 01275 332516

EAT THIS

For twenty years the people of Newcastle have been forced to breathe in toxic fumes pumped out from the Byker incinerator. Not content with this, in 1993 Newcastle Council decided that they should eat toxic waste as well, and so dumped 2,000 tonnes of incinerator ash on allotments and parks around the city. A report out this week has found that dioxin (extremely nasty persistent cancer causing chemicals) levels in the ash were almost 2,000 times higher than the safe recommended limit. Levels of dioxins in eggs from allotment hens were found to be up to 20 times greater than the levels found in 'normal' eggs. The report concluded that by eating one Byker egg daily you would be doubling your cancer risk. The eating of vegetables and eggs on 22 allotments have been banned, but the Council, the Environment Agency and the Food Standards Agency are assuring people there is really nothing to worry about. The Council and the operators of the incinerator will soon be facing 19 charges between them of illegally disposing of toxic waste.

There could well be an incinerator coming your way soon, as the government are planning to build 160 new incinerators over the next 20 years, so enjoy your allotment food whilst you still can. **Communities Against Toxics**, PO Box 29, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH66 3TX Tel/Fax 0151 339 5473 ralph@tcpublications.freemove.co.uk

* There are plans afoot to build an incinerator close to Crymlyn Bog SSSI near Swansea. Local residents don't fancy this idea much and have organised a demo this Saturday (17th), assemble 10:30 for 11am move off outside Cape Horner Pub, St Thomas, Swansea. Contact 01792 425231 for info.

Women's Day

"People everywhere are demanding a total change of priorities. Women and girls do the work of giving birth to, feeding and caring for the whole world. But this vital work of survival and community is devalued and those who do it are demeaned" - Wages For Housework Campaign.

The International Wages for Housework Campaign have called a global women's strike on March 8th which is International Women's Day, urging women to 'stop the world and change it'. Last year's Global Strike saw waged and unwaged women from over 60 countries take part in demonstrations, vigils and parties to celebrate Women's Day and develop strategies of resistance.

In Spain, cleaners went on strike whilst immigrant women spoke out; in India Dalit and Tribal village women demanded wages for all work; and in Uganda women mobilised to discuss their needs.

For details of what's going on this year contact: International Wages for Housework Campaign, 230a Kentish Town Road, London, NW5 2AB. 0207 482 2496, <http://womenstrike8m.server101.com>

* **Women and Children First: Painted Monkey display** is a collection of paintings by indigenous children from Chiapas. Opens on 23rd at 6pm, with a video "women and children confront the military" at 7:30pm. The exhibition takes place until the 16th March at Crossroads Women's Centre, 230A Kentish Town Road (entrance Caversham Road) London NW5. Fully wheelchair accessible. Opening times Monday-Friday 12am-4pm Thursdays 5-7pm Entrance by donation with proceeds going to Indigenous women in Chiapas. For more info contact 020 7482 2496

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2001 & All That

Last year fat boy fat (a.k.a John Prescott) announced a transport budget that could be called a New Deal for car drivers (see SchNEWS 288). Hastings looks set to become one of the first 'beneficiaries', when the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) gave the all clear for two new bypasses to be built around the town. The proposed roads will destroy two SSSI's and cut through an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but Councillors and business leaders argue that the motorway standard roads are essential to help regenerate the town, which is one of the south-east's most deprived. A study into the bypasses warned that they could result in a loss of 300 jobs in the town centre, as jobs are sucked out of town to a new greenfield business park. It also highlights the fact that 95 percent of traffic is local, which will mean the roads will be of very little benefit. Battle lines are now being drawn, to keep informed get on the mailing list of the A27 Action Group who for £3/£1 will send you their excellent newsletter, write to them at 56 Firle Village, East Sussex, BN8 6LG.

* A report out this week by the very man who advised the government on their transport plan, has predicted that although by 2010 we will have spent £60billion on improving our roads. Most journey times will only be reduced by 1 second a minute, and journeys on motorways and in rural areas will actually take longer. Is that what they call best value? Full copy of report is available from the Council for Protection of Rural England on 020 7976 6433 www.cpre.org.uk

Sub Normal

Over 1000 peace and anti-nuclear campaigner took part in a demonstration against Faslane Trident Submarine Base in Scotland on Monday. 'The Big Blockade', a major event in the peace movement calendar, attracted people from all over the world. Faslane is home to the four-strong fleet of Trident nuclear submarines, which activists claim are in breach of international law due to their inability to distinguish between civilians and soldiers.

Arriving at 7am, the campaigners linked arms and formed a chain designed to prevent workers from entering the base. Scottish ministers performed a service of worship. As at previous Faslane blockades, arrests were high. Police moved in, breaking up the chain and arresting around 385; Green MEP Caroline Lucas, Tommy Sheridan MSP and George Galloway MP were amongst the arrested. "The fact that parliamentarians, ministers of religion, a senior lawyer and a prominent author are among those arrested shows that this campaign is not restricted to a few activists but is beginning to engage civic society," said a spokesperson for Trident Ploughshares, one of the groups co-ordinating the event.

Trident Ploughshares 2000: 01324 880744 www.gn.apc.org/tp2000/

GR-EASY MONEY

BP-Amoco are earning £24,000 a minute at the moment - £1 billion a month. Them and Shell are currently suffering from inundation - of profits. This is the green company who are proposing to spend £200 million over the next five years on renewable energy - that's less than a week's earnings for them (see SchNEWS 276). Take away the £6 billion a year they are putting into oil exploration and the fact that nearly 75% of takings at the pump is taxed, and still they're creaming in these amounts. Now George Trouble-ya Bush is in BP will get the green light to drill oil in Alaska.

SchNEWS in brief

Naughty activists this week dug up a field of **genetically modified oilseed rape** at a farm near Harbury, escaping undetected. www.dig-it-up.uk.net ** **A-infos**, the anarchist internet collective have a new e-mail address for contributions in english a-infos-en@ainfos.ca ** A government's expert advisory committee has expressed serious doubts on the prospect of success of **pig-to-human organ transplants (xenotransplantation)**. The report described the research into the procedure, being led by Imutran, as having led up a "blind alley". Dan Lyons of Uncaged (who have been campaigning against this cruel research) is giving a talk next Monday (19th) 8pm, The Bath House, Gwydir St, Cambridge www.uncaged.co.uk ** If you've got any **film footage of police violence at the S26 protests in Prague**, or have video editing experience, the Prague legal support team would love to hear from you. They have until April 12 to make a film for a Human Rights Film Festival being held in Prague, to be attended by the UN Human Rights Commissioner. praguelegalsupport@purpleturtle.com ** Water is due to start pouring into the **Itoiz Dam** in Spain next month. A new report has indicated the project has an extremely high risk of catastrophe, and would never be permitted in any other EU country. Solidarios Con Itoiz are calling for a halt until experts have checked it thoroughly. stopitoiz@yahoo.co.uk ** There's a **picket for Mark Barnsley**, next Tuesday (20th), 1-2pm, at the Prison Service HQ, Cleland House, Page Street, London, SW1 4NL (nearest tube St James's Park) <http://www.freemarkbarnsley.com> ** Get down to London next weekend (23-25th) for **The Squat Thing** a weekend of squatter culture and DIY events at the Button Factory, corner of Hardess St and Herne Hill Rd, Brixton. To contribute Tel: 07890 363646 ** **Day of action against Sodexho** (prisons and vouchers for asylum seekers) April 4, planning meeting on Feb 27, at the Celests Pub, corner of Kentish Town Road and Islip Street, London at 5:30pm ** **Oxyacetelene**, Oxford's fortnightly direct action news-sheet is in need of money, and people to help with writing and distribution oxyace@ukonline.co.uk 07970 343 486 ** For more dates and events check out **Party and Protest** on the SchNEWS website.

...and finally...

Forget about whales and dolphins, if you want to show someone you really care adopt a soldier for them. That's right, a soldier. Visit www.adoptasoldier.org and you can choose your own special member of the military to form a friendship with. The website also offers helpful hints on getting started with your letters, such as "In the letter, explain that you wish to correspond with them and show your support as a US citizen. Let them know how thankful you are for their sacrifices." You can choose to correspond with US troops in a variety of different locations including Kosovo, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and are encouraged to progress to sending gifts such as CDs, videos, food and clothes. This surely is a project for all the family, as the website suggests, "Anyone interested can adopt a member of the military: Girl Scout Troops, home/public/private school students, Sunday school class projects, businesses, individuals and families are examples of these who have adopted a member of the military thus far."

disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers we're rushed off our feet doing a hundred lines. Honest!