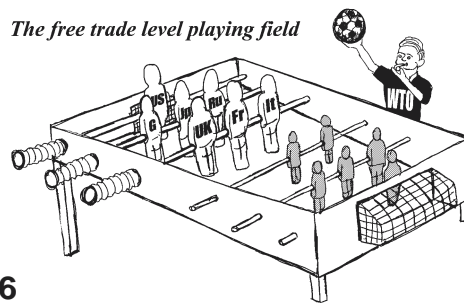




wake up!! It's yer free info not free trade

# SchNEWS

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Free/Donation

Issue 506

## LOOK CAFTA NUMBER ONE

*"For us the free trade agreement has many consequences; we already have much poverty, and it is the rich that will be the beneficiaries at the cost of the poor. We will have to find new ways of bringing bread to our tables."*

- Floricelda, Guatemala.

Last Thursday, US Congress approved the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) by 217 votes to 215. (Another overwhelming majority then.)

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) worked a treat. The deal, signed between Canada, the US and Mexico over ten years ago, made it much easier for multinational corporations to access Mexico's markets and cheap wages. Corporate profits soared. Wal-Mart can now flog t-shirts for less than \$2 and still make a healthy profit, thanks to easier access to sweatshop labour.

Pleased with such a result, White House Inc. decided to try and grab the whole continent with the Free Trade Area of the Americas (SchNEWS 432). But since South America has gone all lefty this has stalled, so they've scaled down their plans and come up with the Central American Free Trade Agreement - CAFTA. Which means more free-market misery lies ahead for the majority of Central Americans, and now that the Dominican Republic has joined the group, the agreement has become known as 'DR-CAFTA': a not-so-secret plot for the corporate take over of the Americas.

While George bullshits to Congress with "It's a pro-jobs bill. It's a pro-growth bill. It's a pro-democracy bill", the truth is that Dr-CAFTA is intended to force open 'new markets' and make it easier for corporations to do business - with all the resulting increases in the gap between rich and poor, trashing of the environment and human rights abuses in the process.

If it's such a great treaty, SchNEWS wonders why El Salvador waited till 3am the Friday before Christmas to vote on it, with their legislative assembly surrounded by riot police! Guatemalan politicians meanwhile considered moving to a hotel for their vote. Now Honduras' Assembly members are slinking off to some secret location so as not to face the people of their country. "Clearly this is not a popular accord and can only pass by the most devious and secretive means," reckons Tom Ricker of the social justice organisation, the Quixote Centre.

### DR STRANGELOVE

So what will Dr-CAFTA do for Central Americans? Checking out what NAFTA (SchNEWS 200) did for Mexico gives us

a clue: workers' wages halved, standards of living fell and unemployment increased in the countryside. The removal of price controls led to a quadrupling of the price of corn (the Mexican staple). But this did not help the farmers, now competing with US agribusiness: the price they receive for their produce is half what it was before NAFTA. But hey, the richest are getting richer while the poorest are getting shafted - that's progress, neoliberal globalisation style.

Dr-CAFTA's got plans for the environment too: it gives companies the right to sue any government that obstructs their 'right' to profit with petty environmental regulations. Thanks to a NAFTA court ruling the US-based Ethyl Corporation forced Canada to pay \$13 million in damages and drop its ban on the dangerous gasoline additive MMT, a known toxin that attacks the human nervous system.

And while the G8 (including US and Canada) spouted crocodile tears over Africa and AIDS, Dr-CAFTA will work to reduce access to cheap drugs in Central America condemning thousands to death. This is because US lawmakers have insisted that the agreement adheres to intellectual property rights, stopping the production of cheaper generic drugs. Access to these more affordable drugs is imperative for a region where 275,000 people have HIV. Despite this, the Guatemalan government, under pressure from the US, rescinded a law passed last year - taken "in the public health interest" to get rid of what is known as "data exclusivity" - meaning the ability to produce generic drugs if it can be shown that they are based on tests already completed by others. Without the access to test data, such drugs can be blocked from use

### The Level Playing Field

Governments continually use that defender of 'Free Trade' - The World Trade Organisation - to challenge laws in other countries which get in the way of free trade. Currently being challenged as 'barriers to trade' are minor things like:

- \* EU marking scheme that ensures imports comply with essential health, safety and environmental protection laws (opposed by China)
- \* The Australian Heart Foundation's 'tick' scheme, which approves healthyfood products (opposed by Malaysia)
- \* Trade measures used to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (opposed by the Philippines) and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (opposed by Malaysia).
- \* The EU moratorium on import of new GM crops (opposed by USA, Canada and Argentina.)

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For being aboriginal

A 15 year old aboriginal boy in Western Australia has been arrested, held in custody for twelve days and flown 1500km to Perth to appear in children's court in a police operation costing A\$10,000. The crime? Wait for it - stealing an ice cream. Aboriginal Legal Service lawyer Peter Collins claims that "the approach taken... smacks of overkill". Just a bit. SchNEWS thinks the racist legal system in WA should 'chill out' - with a nice ice cream. Apparently the said ice cream was returned to the shop undamaged. See <http://melbourne.indymedia.org>

for up to ten years while expensive research is being duplicated. AIDS patients have taken to the streets in Guatemala to counter such measures, but in the US the clause within the agreement hardly merits attention.

### NAFF OFF

But this is not the US vs Central America. Just like NAFTA, workers in all the signatory countries are going to lose out to big business interests. NAFTA enabled company bosses to sack 820,000 car workers in the US who were earning \$18 an hour and swap them for 700,000 Mexican workers on \$5 a day. Demonstrations against the treaty have hit US cities from San Francisco to Washington DC. The people of Central America have staged widespread protests and actions including their speciality, blockading roads. In response, US trained and equipped armed forces have again been flexing their military might to suppress the population. In Guatemala workers went on strike for a week demanding a referendum - tooled-up cops used tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets and live ammunition to break up protests resulting in dozens of injuries and the death of at least one protestor.

CAFTA is one of numerous treaties (funny no one ever proposed a Latin American Free Trade Agreement) tying developing countries to neoliberal reform, helping globalising corporations secure their dominance over concepts like humanism, social justice, democratic principles or action. Company bosses are now celebrating being one step nearer to their dream, the Free Trade Area of the Americas - freedom to screw the majority of the population so a global capitalist elite can make shed loads of cash, that is. Doesn't it make you want to do something about it?

See [www.stopcafta.org](http://www.stopcafta.org)

\* Read 'Shafted: Free Trade and America's Working Poor' where farmers, fishermen, garment workers etc. describe the ruin that free trade agreements have unleashed on them. To order copies [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)

## China In The Bull Shop

Imagine the following scenario: Big American Business wants to get involved in some other country's local energy market. The Yanks have already pushed through the necessary 'free market' rules to make sure it would be 'illegal' not to allow (their) foreign investment, so if the local government or people are uncomfortable with the idea and even think of trying to democratically block it, the US taps its fingers on the 'rulebook', claims the locals are standing in the way of 'free' and 'fair' trade, and threatens to throw its economic (or ultimately military, if necessary) toys out of the pram unless they stick to their rules. A familiar enough story being played out once again...except, this time, there's a twist.

The local country in this case is in fact America and the big foreign investor is China. The Chinese energy firm CNOOC, although 71% state funded still a listed company on the New York Stock Exchange and thus subject to all the regulations (or lack of) that apply to any other multinational, have bid \$18.5 billion to buy Unocal, an American oil and gas company. And how have the United States of Freedom responded to this chance to lead by example and demonstrate how you go about welcoming foreign investment with open arms and happy smiles? That's right, by crying foul and rushing to put the blockers on it, of course.

Washington moved this week to derail the bid - Congress voted 398-15 backing a resolution that Chinese ownership of Unocal would 'threaten to impair the national security of the United States' with a House and Senate panel calling for a 4 month 'study' to assess the impact of China's thirst for energy and examine fears about their growing economic influence. The uncertainty over their findings should be enough to scupper the bid as shareholders are due to vote on a (smaller) bid from Chevron on Aug 10<sup>th</sup>. Note that nobody is saying the Chinese shouldn't be allowed in due to their poor environmental or human rights record - that would be the pot calling the kettle black we guess - besides Unocal have a pretty dubious record themselves having worked hand in glove with the Taliban and operated in Burma in their single-minded search for profits (SchNEWS 387 & 373)

Surely the Americans can't be scared? Big mighty bully-boy Uncle Sam feeling a little bit threatened by someone else's economic power - excuse us if we at SchNEWS can't resist a large snigger at this point. As Senator Byron Dorgan said "I think we ought to slow things down" - although we assume he wasn't talking about the global imposition of 'free' trade agreements to dismantle all subsidies and trade protection barriers which the subsidy-loving trade-protectionist US can pick and choose whether to comply with should any American business interests be threatened. We would suggest CNOOC should sue the US government through the World Trade Organisation to claim hefty compensation from a country obviously not embracing the free-market principles, but we don't suppose they trust that 'independent' body to give them a fair and unbiased hearing...

## Inside SchNEWS

Were you arrested on Wednesday morning during the **G8 protests** at the blockade of the A9? Were you put in the back of a police van, while in the front was another protester who was white, 28, male, skinny and wearing a maroon hoodie? Please contact davidg8legal@hotmail.com

\* **Steve Marshall** is currently on remand accused of planning to destroy equipment belonging to a quarry company which was polluting a river. It's his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday on 27<sup>th</sup> August, so send cards to Steve Marshall #68511-065, Federal Detention Center, PO Box 5000, Sheridan, OR 97378, USA.

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## Hotting Up In Iceland

The temperature's rising in Iceland, where protestors are battling to stop the disastrous **Karahnjukar Dam from being built** (see SchNEWS 486). The dam will cost over \$1 billion, flood miles upon miles of pristine wilderness and line the pockets of aluminium giant Alcoa and war-profiteers Bechtel.

Icelanders pleaded for international solidarity and many have made the long journey there to help protect the wilderness. Iceland has no tradition of protest or direct action, so police and workers have been on the back foot against tactics they had never met before. A conference was interrupted by guerilla yoghurt-wielding protestors on June 14<sup>th</sup>, who coated fat cats in manky cow juice. At an action on July 19<sup>th</sup>, when protestors locked on to vehicles to stop work, police had to make up an Icelandic word for "lock-on"! A cop-car had to rush 100km to the nearest town to get some cutters. 13 were detained, but nobody has yet been charged. 25 protestors again locked on to vehicles to stop work on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Relations with the workers were relaxed, but when the cops arrived they ordered the drivers to start their vehicles and move off.

"It was terrifying, if someone hadn't jumped up on the front of the truck and pulled out the fuel line then I think people may have been killed last night" said Rob, one of the protestors from the UK. Police allegedly sexually assaulted one woman and another protestor was assaulted by security personnel while being held by police. Three people are being held on fabricated assault charges and may face deportation.

The protestors are appealing for solidarity actions and for people to come and stay at their protest camp and take part in the struggle.

To find out more about what's going on in Iceland and how you can help, check out: [www.savingiceland.org](http://www.savingiceland.org) and [www.indymedia.org.uk](http://www.indymedia.org.uk)

## Positive SchNEWS

Football has been described as the **opium of the masses**, but tell us when you last went to a meeting of 1,600 people demanding direct action about the game? Well that's what has been happening in Manchester over the summer when pissed off Man Utd fans finally had enough when their club was taken over by an American billionaire.

The action they took was very direct: they've set up their own club - FC United of Manchester (shortened to FCUM - see what they've done there?!) OK, so they will be heading for places like Blackpool Mechanics and Daisy Hill instead of the Champions League, but as other fan controlled clubs like Enfield Town and AFC Wimbledon have found out, non-league is a whole different ballgame...

Luc Zenetar from FC Utd said "I am sick of football and what it has become. The money. The arrogance. The lack of connection between the players and the fans. The way we, the supporters, are treated, the Gestapo-like environment. I can't stand the fact that it costs £36 to get into a ground with no atmosphere, where you can't stand, can't shout, can't fart, can't even sit with your friends. And then Rio Ferdinand, who earns £75,000 a week, gets banned for eight months through his own stupidity, has the gall to demand over £100,000 just to carry on."

Another United fan added, "We want a club where supporters are not seen as 'customers' but as an integral part of the very club they support. One member, one vote. No person above or below any other."

Forgot the bitching that Man United had it coming, if FC United is as successful as the other fan-owned clubs then maybe the tide against corporate football will begin to turn. See [www.fc-utd.co.uk](http://www.fc-utd.co.uk)

PS No SchNEWS next week cos we'll all be at the Big Green Gathering growing beards and playing with mooncups...

## SchNEWS in brief

Friends and family of **Jean Charles de Menezes**, the Brazilian shot dead by cops last week have set up a campaign and urgently need support and funds 07956 210332 justice4jean@hotmail.co.uk

\*\* **Have you had enough of commercial queer identity?** Do we really want to march alongside the army and police? Planning meeting for a Radical Queer Action during Brighton's Gay Pride this Sunday (31) Cowley Club 12 London Road 5pm \*\* **South Wales Dissent! Gathering** (6-7th) A chance to evaluate the G8 mobilisation and discuss the future of the network. South Wales [www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk) \*\* **Oldskool Hardcore club night** to help fund legal support for those nicked at the G8. The Volks, Brighton, Weds 3rd Aug 10-2am £2 \*\* **London Rising Tide film night** and a post-G8 climate action debrief Sunday (7th) 3pm at LARC, 62 Fieldgate St (Whitechapel tube) 07708 794665 [www.londonrisingtide.org.uk](http://www.londonrisingtide.org.uk) \*\* Direct action next weekend to remember the **60 anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki** Aldermaston, Berkshire 07788 50 3761 [www.aldermaston.net](http://www.aldermaston.net) \*\* Oh look, two notable members from **Oxford University** are amongst the four Oxfordshire representatives of the Thames Valley Police Authority. Is that why TVP have been so heavy handed over protests against the building of a University vivisection lab? The lab remains half built after contractors pulled out a year ago. [www.speakcampaigns.org.uk](http://www.speakcampaigns.org.uk) \*\* From Monday, the **Serious Organised Crime and Police Act** makes all unauthorised protests within 1km of Parliament illegal. Join the mass defiance demo next Sunday (7<sup>th</sup>) 12pm Parliament Square. [www.parliament-square.org.uk](http://www.parliament-square.org.uk)

\* Campaigning continues for the **Rosport 5** - jailed for opposing a dangerous gas pipeline (see SchNEWS 505) There were recently blockades of Statoil garages in Dublin and Cork as well as the main Shell deport. Reports are on [indymedia.ie](http://indymedia.ie) - background on Shell and Rosport [www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story\\_id=986](http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=986)

### ROADS BRIEFS

\* Southend roads protesters recently ripped down the fences surrounding **Priory Park** which is due to be trashed, alongside a Saxon Kings' burial mound, by a new road scheme. If it goes ahead, local residents are promising more direct action [www.savepriorypark.org](http://www.savepriorypark.org)

\* The green light has been given to the controversial **Tyne tunnel** ([www.tyne-crossings.org](http://www.tyne-crossings.org)) and a major new port near London, at Shell Haven, on the condition that parts of the M25 are widened.

\* The government has backed down on building a huge tunnel at **Stonehenge**. Because of damage to the world heritage site? Er, no, cos it would cost a whopping £470 million. See [www.savestonehenge.org.uk](http://www.savestonehenge.org.uk)

\* **To keep up to date with road protests see [www.roadblock.org.uk](http://www.roadblock.org.uk) [www.roadalert.org.uk](http://www.roadalert.org.uk)**

## ...and finally...

**SchNEWS spotted this thread on a women's health web-forum:**

"Basically, the action will promote the awareness and use of the mooncup, and other reusable menstrual products and the politics of menstruation... the climax (of the action) being street theatre involving a public insertion (or removal) of the mooncup, with a backdrop of dancing moons to the music of 'I bleed' by The Pixies. Because of the eco-friendly aspect of the mooncup, the action could also be used to say how shit Cardiff is on recycling and so forth. If you'd like to be a dancing moon as well, get in touch."

"Hello. I'm with a health collective in Chicago, and we're interested in possibly doing actions around this too. Can you tell me, what's a Cardiff?"

What is a 'Cardiff' indeed.

### Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers don't just look CAFTA your own, look NAFTA others is important too.