



WAKE UP!! WAKE UP!! IT'S YER INVOLUNTARY...

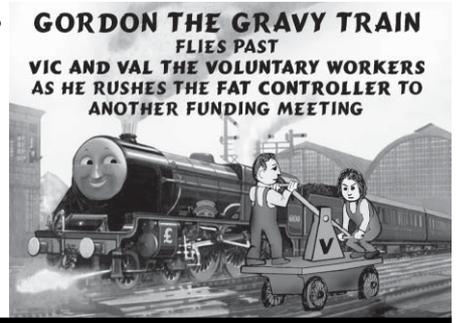
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CHARITY BALLS NEO LABOUR PUTS PINCH ON VOLUNTARY SECTOR

From the Bulgarian education system to the Bolivian water supply, capitalists love nothing more than turning an area of life previously financed by universal taxation into a source of profit. The announcement that the government's new get-tough-on-disabled-people regime will not be implemented by a government department is an indicator of a much wider process - the wholesale privatisation of public services in Britain. The 'assessment' of disabled people, care homes, employment and training services, the justice system; all are up for grabs.

But rather than selling children's homes directly to the Correction Corporation of America, the government is sugaring the pill by starting the sell-off to charities. Using the rhetoric of 'local empowerment' to spearhead this privatisation makes sense for the government because charities are widely trusted and seen as having expertise in delivering services. It also saves money - for a start, charities have millions of volunteers, most of them dedicated to helping others rather than making money. Forcing highly unionised local authority workers into casualised jobs with charities will drastically reduce their bargaining power. At least minimising their wage bill costs will maximise the margins available for profit and management expenses.

Privatising basic services wasn't possible in the past because of opposition from welfare lobbyists, charities and unions - but that's all changing as major charities now support the turn away from state provision. An alliance of neo-labour ideologues and ambitious managers in the voluntary sector are embarking on a process that will eventually return social welfare to the 19th century with private businesses making money out of poverty, while charities pick up the pieces where there's no profits to be made.

While charities traditionally ran some projects alongside campaigning for government action to deal with social problems, many bigger charities now see privatisation as a way of increasing their own power and influence. It's hardly surprising - the top 1.6% of charities account for 60% of the voluntary sector's income and these mega-charities are already run like corporations. Their hierarchical career structure for professionals often means that the boardroom is a long way removed from the streets.

The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations recently stated that "there may be a dissonance between some

of the values associated with the sector, including its independence, and its increasing role in the delivery of services on behalf of government," but nevertheless decided that the whole thing was "a very good opportunity for the third sector to grow in size and influence". With a need to retain and expand market share, daft ideas like campaigning and independence soon go out the window.

FAITH, HOPE & PRECARITY

Creating a market is a costly business - and it's not spent on improving services. It's spent on creating a whole new layer of managers and consultants to set up and market the new service 'brand' to new potential customers, mechanisms that weren't needed when services were just provided free to those who needed them. But capitalists will always find ways of affording this switch, because the money to be made from cherry-picking most profitable areas from billions of pounds worth of services is a prize well worth winning. The government is currently spending £188m on getting the voluntary sector up to speed on the inner workings of privatisation. A world of conferences and training sessions, forums and partnerships has been established to get community and voluntary groups to accept the dominance of market forces in service delivery and accept neo-liberal ideas as common sense.

The privatisation of the welfare state is also about preventing the possibility of dissent. Neo Labour has noticed that when privatisation begins to bite anywhere in the world, it's the community groups that make up civil society that are in the forefront of opposition to it. The changes going through now are designed to hard-wire community groups into the privatisation agenda with jobs and contracts at risk which will make it very difficult for these charities to think and act independently of government in the future.

Even the language in this pseudo-corporate world doesn't allowed dissent to be mouthed without being considered 'inappropriate' or 'unhelpful'. Of course, the 'partnerships' that government is creating to implement privatisation are not about sharing real power - they involve infantilising 'consultations' where experienced charity workers are asked to stick their views on the wall on post-its by patronising, jargon-spouting bureaucrats who think they invented 'community' in 1997. Real decisions are taken by the usual business elites.

Once the market is created, new areas of profit-making potential will exist - that's

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For wearing a t-shirt (again)

Cindy Sheehan - who's son died in Iraq and has since held an anti-war camp near George W's ranch in Texas - was arrested at Dubai's State Of The Union speech on Tuesday night. She'd been given a ticket to attend by a congressperson, and while she had no intention of disrupting the speech, wore a t-shirt saying '2245 Dead. How many more?'. After sitting in her seat, as soon as she unzipped her jacket a goon shouted 'protester' and she was bundled out and arrested. She was released four hours later.

when the cost-cutting corporations appear with lawyers holding copies of WTO free competition rules to put an end to local charities delivering sensitive, imaginative local services. Even before this, competitive pressure to deliver a minimum service will soon reduce the flexibility and freedom of workers to act as they see fit, or go 'the extra mile' in particular cases - well, you wouldn't want to bring down your performance evaluation statistics, would you?

And of course privatising basic services takes them out of democratic control. As veteran Glasgow community activist Bob Holman says, "Local authorities are answerable to electors but national voluntary societies are dominated by wealthy and privileged people - huge amounts of state money are now putting even more power in the hands of unelected elites."

Still, not everyone is going along with the sell-off. Public service unions are getting ready to fight for their jobs and the integrity of the services they provide, and many charity workers who work directly with people in need rather than 'managing delivery options' are deeply suspicious of what's happening. A fight to defend basic, universal services from the tender mercies of the market could be brewing. We should perhaps look to local autonomous groups such as the Brighton Migrant English Project (See SchNEWS 523), which has had great success providing essential social support tailored to local needs - all on a shoestring budget. Given a little money, groups like this could be responding to front-line problems and helping build local communities at the same time, but sadly it's unlikely because the only profit in it is social, not financial.

* As an example of how a business ethos dominating the provision of social support to deprived areas leads to little of what is needed and a large slice of the available cash ending up in managers' and consultants' fat pockets, read about a local quango operating in Brighton called eb4u in Rough Music (www.roughmusic.org.uk/#six).

Accidental Democracy

Bringing democracy to the Middle East - wasn't that what the invasion of Iraq was supposed to be about? But it seems that too much democracy in the region is a problem. You just can't trust those cheeky Arabs to vote the right way y' see.

Despite an overwhelming victory in internationally monitored elections in Palestine, the world's power players gathered round to threaten Hamas with the withdrawal of aid necessary to run the Palestinian Authority. With the Palestinian economy strangled under a network of Israeli checkpoints, foreign aid is what keeps the refugee camps viable. Most of the public service wages for doctors, teachers and security officers etc, along with tax revenues are collected and controlled by... Israel, who have just ordered a freeze on remitting the cash (some \$50m per month), saying they will not see it in the hands of 'murderous elements'. They are presumably determined to ensure their own murderous elements remain well funded.

Hamas have won the support of the population more for their solid reputation for incorruptibility than their religious stance or vows to dismantle Israel. As so often in two or three party 'democracies' they were the only other real alternative for a population who had grown tired of the corruption of Arafat's clique and their inability to secure any alleviation of their daily oppression.

However the usual suspects have been rounded up to condemn Hamas as an undemocratic 'terrorist' group and a legitimate target in the War on Terror™. The Israeli state's effort to shape discourse and make parallels between its occupation and the US's struggle against Al-Qaeda has been swallowed whole by the mainstream media, who quote without comment hypocritical demands that Hamas 'renounce' violence in order to receive aid. Meanwhile the billions which pour into Israel come with no such strings attached. In fact Hamas has held a ceasefire since last February, something which can't be said for the Israeli Defence Force.

Sadly, it looks like things are going to get even tougher for the Palestinian people before they get any better. If you're looking for reasons as to why, you'd be better off asking questions about geo-politics, self-interested Israeli power-elites asserting their 'rights' to act as ruthlessly as the US always have, and the US's tacit condoning of the situation, which conveniently provides them with a power base stronghold in the area as they gradually plot their latest cold war - the one with Islam playing the role of communism and US playing the part of ...

* For more see <http://electronicinfitada.net>

COTTONING ON

Mali cotton growers have voted against using genetically modified crops in a 'citizens jury' and are looking at supporting local farmers and strengthening traditional methods. Mali is the largest producer of cotton in sub-Saharan Africa, and is under pressure to move to GM crops and large-scale industrialised farming. Currently Mali's cotton is mostly grown by smallholders. The citizen jury was held during a five day event in Sikasso bringing together local farmers with counterparts from India and South America with experience in GM crops, plus biotech scientists and NGO's. For more see www.iiid.org

LASER ERASERS

Both main gates at the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston were blockaded last Monday by 'Block The Builders' in a protest against the proposed new 'Orion' laser facility at AWE - which would set Aldermaston up to develop new nuclear weapons. This plant would see the UK again break its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as undermining the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. For more see www.blockthebuilders.org.uk

FIGHT ON THE TILES

"If we can't run a successful factory with the bosses, let's try it without". That's how workers at Zanon, a tile factory in Neuquén province in Argentina saw it. And it worked.

In 2001 Argentina went into economic meltdown. Businesses defaulted on their debts, stopped paying their workers and shut the places they worked in. Zanon was just one of these workplaces. Sacked by telegram, with orders unfilled, the workers decided to take over the factory themselves.

Organising day to day activities by elected committees and taking all major decisions by general assembly, the workers started selling the tiles left -paying wages owed and soon they had restarted production, which has grown dramatically, employing more and more people ever since.

Zanon workers have since formed their own, radical, independent trade union, breaking away from the corruption and timidity of the old official unions and fighting for worker's rights to organise in four other ceramics plants. They produce Nuestra Lucha (Our Struggle), "a newspaper of the occupied factories and workers in struggle", plus a radio program and a website. Zanon workers provide free materials to schools, hospitals, community centres, poor families and others in need and the assembly plays an active part in supporting the struggles of other workers, the unemployed and the indigenous community. In return, these companer@s (South American term loosely meaning 'anarchist comrade') have supported Zanon in defeating police attempts to retake the factory for its old bosses, who deserted it over four years ago. Nike claim they, "don't sell shoes, they sell dreams", well, Zanon workers don't just make tiles, they start revolutions.

What did you do at work today? Go and hear what Zanon workers did when they tour the country this month. Feb 13th Brighton 7.30, Brighton Centre, North Road, contact: 07904 431 959 Check out www.nosweat.org.uk for more details.

Inside SchNEWS:

Heather Nicholson, prominent activist with SHAC is on remand for allegedly assaulting a Countryside Alliance supporter. Write to her at NR7271 HMP Bronzefield, Woodthorpe Rd, Ashford, Middlesex TW15 3JT.

* For full details on all anarchist and animal liberation prisoners check out: www.brightonabc.org.uk and www.alfsg.org.uk

CHAIN REACTION

Fancy putting Tony Blair in chains? Fancy putting the whole of Parliament in chains? Well on May 1st you could make it happen. A special kind of protest is being organised to highlight the farcical 'No Protest Zone' around Westminster, part of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act which was rushed through Parliament after last year's London bombings. 6,000 people are needed to form a human chain round the 1km exclusion zone that covers the area around Parliament.

The exclusion zone was an amendment to the original bill, and has no relation to the rest of the Act, which is all about creating a taskforce of super cops to deal with organised crime. The reason the amendment was added was to try and stop Brian Haw's continual, 5 and a half year protest of the British government's foreign policy and sanctions in Iraq, during which he has been camping outside Parliament. This however failed because the idiots who drafted the law stated that organisers of protests need to get Police permission "when the protest starts". As Brian's protest had started years before the law was even dreamt up it didn't apply to him!

If you fancy mixing direct action with a giant game of Hokey-Cokey (careful when you shake it all about, you might get nicked) then go to www.pledgebank.com/protest

Jackboot On The Other Foot

Don't worry, yer so-leftwing-we-can't-see-the-centre SchNEWS hasn't come full circle and joined the far right but we're not totally gutted that Nick Griffin and his gang of bonehead nazi sympathizers got a 'not guilty' in Leeds this week. This attempt by the thought police to restrict freedom of speech under the offence of 'inciting racial hatred' was opening a very dangerous door. The clampdown backfired and all it did was allow a national platform for these wolves to slip on the sheep's coat of civil rights. Community action is what defeats fascism, not the state. Confronting the fascists where their rhetoric is gaining a foothold (thanks to Neo-Labour) is gonna be a thousand times more effective than relying on the political police to do our dirty work. Anti-fascists are taking the fight to the heart of this lunatic political fringe, leafleting estates, raising awareness and physically confronting the BNP racists. For more see www.antifa.org.uk

SchNEWS in brief

Over 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israel's Negev Detention camp have begun a hunger strike in protest at their collective treatment by their jailers. They last had food on Monday. Some of the prisoners were recently denied visits from outside after getting caught celebrating the birthday of the Fateh movement. See www.imemc.org ** Nokia have come under fire at this year's World Economic Forum taking place in Davos, Switzerland. The company stand accused of not complying to any labour laws. Workers cannot organise and are often paid below the legal minimum www.evb.ch/en/p25010664.html ** The Tax Justice Network were refused an invite to the WEF. This is surprising, as the Network deals with shady Corporate tax evasion. They might have learned a thing or two. www.evb.ch/en/p25010662.html ** Wanna get involved in local action against animal abuse in Brighton? There are meetings on the 1st and 3rd Weds of every month at 7pm at the Cowley Club, 12 London Rd, Brighton ** Slavic Night, a barbaric benefit for some very tough Polish streetfighters who wrestle bears, eat nails and shit crowbars. Cowley Club Brighton Saturday 4th Feb 8 onwards.

...and finally...

In this age of risk management, team building exercises and executive stress toys, there's a lot of money in the growth sector of the 'get the edge on your business competitor' expert advice market. But how do you 'think outside the box' when you're an arms company, and you've got pesky anti-war protesters who won't take other forms of intimidation - legal and physical - to get 'on message' before they expose all your dirty work? And worse, it's got to a High Court case against the protesters, your MD's resigned and you still can't stiff them? Well, obviously, call in a stress counselling mediation guru from California to sit in the middle while you and the protesters sit in separate rooms, and at the end you attempt to find some 'common ground' before a group hug and a round of Kum Bayah.

But that's what's happening in the injunction proceedings between Brighton bomb builders EDO MBM and anti-arms-trade activists, where the judge has ordered EDO to appoint a goatee bearded 'mediator' between them and the protesters named in the injunction. It is hoped the protesters will get carried away with the warm fuzzy vibe and agree to let the whole thing go. The meeting is today (3rd Feb), presumably to be held in comfortable agreeable surroundings with ergonomic chairs, neutral colours, mineral water and soothing music...

* For updates see www.smashedo.org.uk

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - don't take the gravy train - you might get your ticket punched... Honest!

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