

WAKE UP!! ITS YER PART OF THE RIFF-RAFAH...

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NEW RETAIL TREND HITS GAZA HIGH ST...



WALL SHOOK UP

AS PALESTINIANS BREAK THE SIEGE OF GAZA AND ENTER EGYPT

FROM SCHNEWS CORRESPONDENTS IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE....

"Gaza stands taller this week thanks to the efforts of their own people. The Gaza Strip, which serves as an open air prison for its 1.5 million inhabitants, is abandoned by the international community as it was subjected to medieval siege tactics. So someone has staged what must be the biggest prison break-out in history.

Since the election of Hamas to the leadership in 2006, the Israeli state has declared the entire population of Gaza to be an 'enemy entity'. Using this spurious status as an excuse, they bludgeoned the population by reducing the supply of food and power, creating economic devastation. Israel's prime minister Ehud Olmert has made it explicit that Israel is punishing the people of Gaza to get to Hamas, saying, "As far as I am concerned, every resident of Gaza can walk because they have no gasoline for their vehicles, because they have a murderous regime that doesn't let people in southern Israel live in peace."

The firing of Quassam rockets into Israel has been Hamas's response to the eighteenth month siege. Most of these home made rockets land in desert areas. Occasionally one lands in an inhabited area and they have killed and injured people. These were used as an excuse to launch brutal military incursions into the strip, long before the rise of the

"Israel is manufacturing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip that is seriously deteriorating every aspect of civilian life." *Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)*

Hamas faction to power. The surrounding of Gaza with the an extension of the apartheid wall (see SchNews 544) has crippled the economy of what is after all supposed to be a refugee camp. The much publicised 'withdrawal' from the strip in 2005 still left Israel in control of the airspace and all the ways in and out.

In response to rocket attacks, previously described by the Israeli Defence ministry as, "more a psychological than physical threat", Gaza was plunged into darkness and

hunger on Sunday as the flow of fuel vital to the running of the powerplants was shut down. According to the PCHR, "To date, forty five patients have died as a direct result of Israeli Occupying Force (IOF) closure and siege of the Gaza Strip. According to the Director of Shiffa Hospital, Dr Hassan Khalaf, patients lives continue to be at stake, including the lives of 30 premature babies in Shiffa Hospital, who will die immediately if there is a power cut at the hospital. Gaza's second major hospital, the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, has now suspended all major surgical operations" - At least one family had to hand crank the respirator for their premature baby.

Following this, tens of thousands of Palestinians congregated at the southern Rafah border crossing with Egypt on Tuesday 22nd. Previously this crossing has only been opened with Israeli consent. The crowd formed into

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

for having a weak throw...

Jon Leighton, a supporter of Giles Chamberlain - living in Central Oxford up a tree threatened by a shopping centre expansion (see back page story) - was caught out trying to chuck a bottle of water up to him one night. His throw was sadly off target and police swiftly arrested the eighteen-year-old - for littering! Obviously a dangerous menace, he was handcuffed, bundled roughly off to the station, fingerprinted and DNA sampled... and let go without charge in the morning, after being told by one custody copper with little sense of irony that, "it wasn't exactly crime of the century was it..."! Eau dear, water palava etc...

distinct layers, with Palestinian women at the front up close and personal, trying to scale the gates. Waiting in the wings were their men. On the other side lined up and ready were the Egyptian police. The scene was Gaza in microcosm; one and a half million people caged, starved, desperate, pitting their bodies against soldiers and demanding that the outside world do something about their plight.

The Hamas government issued an ultimatum to Egypt - Open the crossing. Do what Israel refuses to do and supply us with food, medicine and fuel. President Hosni Mubarak, being a key US and Israeli ally, refused. As the masses surged forward the gates opened. It was like a scene from the last days of Soviet Europe. Egyptian military police stormed across the bridge batons raised. They met the crowd but after ten minutes found that truncheons alone could not stem the human tide. They soon opened fire. In seconds the area was filled with smoke and dust as people went down. Stetchers came forward empty

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ITT'S A LOCK-OUT AT EDO

After a successful Freedom to Protest march in Brighton on 19th Jan, which saw at least 150 turn out to scuffle with police in the city centre, on Wednesday (23rd) STUDENTS AGAINST EDO took militant action against Brighton bomb builders EDO MBM's facility in Fishersgate and successfully stopped the warmongers from working for over six hours.

At around 5am, while two took to occupying the roof of the factory, two locked on to the main gates and two others super glued themselves to external doors and shutters. This was the first time in a long time that EDO have been completely blockaded and production prevented. A group of supporters gathered outside to sing and dance the hours away. There was no access to the building and deliveries were stopped. Managing Director Paul Hills was forced out to see why employees couldn't get to

work. The police arrived swiftly but seemed utterly baffled by the new tactics.

Under increasing police pressure, by late morning those locked on agreed to release themselves. Despite initial promises to make no arrests - those on the roof were nicked for criminal damage. They were bailed a few hours later and have to go back next month to see if they'll be charged.

This action was the first since EDO shareholders voted in favour of a takeover by US defence and military equipment corporation ITT (SchNEWS 612). And if you though EDO were bad, ITT has a record of involvement with a Who's Who of global fascism.. Company founder, Sosthenes Behn was the first American businessman to meet with Adolf Hitler when he became chancellor of Germany in 1933, and in 1937

he prepared a banquet for Franco's anticipated arrival in Republican Madrid.

ITT continued to invest in Nazi Germany throughout World War II, involved in the manufacture of Luftwaffe fighter aircraft and providing military equipment for the Nazi armed forces. In 2000, declassified CIA documents revealed that ITT funded the military coup which deposed the democratically elected socialist leader of Chile Salvador Allende in 1973 and paved the way for Pinochet's brutal police state.

One campaigner told SchNews, "This is not a company we want operating and making profit in our town, and we will continue to campaign until there are no arms companies in our community. ITT are bigger and nastier than EDO MBM, but they don't intimidate us..." www.smashedo.org.uk

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

Copyleft
Published in Brighton since 1994

to be filled with casualties. The police closed the gates on the Palestinian side of crossing before beating a hasty retreat.

What happened next caught the world by surprise - a non-violent bombing by the 'terrorist' forces of Hamas. In the early hours of Wednesday 23rd, eight holes were blown in the 9m high steel and concrete wall. Hours later and Gazans were pouring across the border to get their hands on everything they'd been denied. 200,000 are estimated to have crossed the border. Faced with this fait accompli, Mubarak allowed the Palestinians the freedom of Egyptian Rafah. Palestinians however have been refused the right to travel any further than the border town of Al-Arish.

Internationals and Israeli peace activists have organised their own convoy of aid to Gaza. On Sat 26th they'll attempt to get oil, lentils and other food into the Strip together with water filters. They say, "We'll go to the Gaza border, in co-operation with Palestinian partners inside Gaza, to show there's an alternative to siege and rocketfire."

Demonstrations erupted around the Arab world as people watched events from Gaza live and unedited. What is happening is frighteningly pros regimes around the Middle East. In Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon and elsewhere, people have taken their frustrations out into the streets. After all if there one thing corrupt leaders fear more than anything else, it's mass action. If people can get this angry about what's happening in Gaza how long before they focus attention closer to home at their own governments?

SWISS ROLE AT WEF BUNFIGHT

Corporate bosses and their government allies have a full agenda when they meet in the Swiss mountain resort of Davos this week for the World Economic Forum (WEF). War criminals will feel at home as the WEF is co-chaired by Tony Blair and Henry Kissinger. They're joined by the bosses of huge banks in the US and India, the man from Pepsi and the CEO of a rather large mobile phone company from the People's Republic of China. Bill Gates and Bono are jetting in too, to spout on about ending world poverty. When they're not too busy making bold sacrifices in the name of PR for the public good, the plan remains the same: the corporate take-over of the world in a race to the bottom for lower wages and higher profits. (Hence holding it in location that sounds like a place that could spawn Daleks, no doubt.)

But now those profits are looking a bit shaky. The consumer orgy of the last ten years has been paid for on the never-never and now people cannot afford to repay their debts. Banks are writing off billions of pounds of bad loans and profits are not what they once were. One of the world's biggest companies, *CitiGroup* have just announced that it had managed to make a £5 billion loss in just three months. The bank is represented on the UK high street branded as *CitiFinancial* who offer loans to the working poor at more than 60% interest. On paper lending to poor people is a real winner because you can charge them much more interest and

that's great for profits. But a higher interest rate means higher repayments and, unsurprisingly, if people are already skint its inevitable that at some point they'll fail to pay. Now all the investors who poured money into banking shares are watching their share portfolios shrink rapidly. What a pity.

In reality the current crisis is really about a shift in economic power from the West to China and India. And of course, when a downturn comes company bosses are not going to axe their own positions when they can just as easily lay off millions of non-unionised workers. Whilst the world leaders take a break from negotiations and tuck into rare buffalo, trout and fried squash blossoms filled with wild mushrooms, 800 million people around the world are living in starvation. This state of affairs has not gone unnoticed and anti-capitalist demos have taken place in and around the Swiss resort (not for the first time, see SchNEWS 246 for example). In St Gallen, 150 people demonstrated peacefully against the 'elite' Forum. Although that demo went ahead without much fuss, over in Bern a third of the protesters on a march were nicked after police charged in with rubber bullets and tear gas. Security is tighter than ever, with 5,000 soldiers and 28 military aircraft being drafted in to help crush resistance. And all in the week Gordon Blair (oops, Brown) was quoted as calling for new 'New World Order'.. we can't wait to see how that pans out...

OXFORD BLUES

As protestors take to the trees in shopping centre nightmare

Mass protests, tree sitting, cat and mouse games with chainsaw-wielding contractors, spurious arrests, tree spiking... no it's not yet another nostalgic piece about the mid-nineties but 2008 in central Oxford.

And the cause of all this unrest? Another screw-the-environment-it's-all-about-the-economy-stupid retail development of course. Despite being already choked by its medieval layout, with its roads gridlocked and groaning from the weight of traffic, since 1999 the council have been trying to accept plans from Capital Shopping Centres to revamp and massively expand the existing Westgate shopping centre.

Widespread opposition and a public inquiry led John Prescott to eventually put the blockers on the deal in 2002 when the decision it was 'called in' (as the quaint governmental parlance puts it) and rejected, leading to a failed appeal in 2003. But you can't keep a good cartel of bigwigs down for long and in 2006 uncannily similar plans were again presented and this time they meant business. Unfazed by their alleged green sentiments and policy commitments to 'sustainability', 'renewable energy' and the like (as most councils usually are when big business cash starts sloshing around), the council have again no problem giving the green light to the monster expansion as part of a more general gentrification scheme for the entire West end of Oxford.

The plan is to triple the size of the current Westgate church of capitalism and turn it into a real retail cathedral, complete with a sorely needed new John Lewis department store. That's along with 90 other new shops and massive car park. All eating into nearby affordable housing and precious bits of surviving green strips of land, including a number of fine mature trees in the area.

Even though completion of the project involves obtaining compulsory purchase (i.e. destruction) orders on Abbey Place, a fairly recent development of council-run residential care homes for the handicapped, the enquiry into that hadn't even finished when the contractors began confidently to cut down nearby trees all ready

for construction works to begin. As usual, they assumed that by getting in early, maybe nobody would notice. But direct action has reared its dreadlocked head once again in the esteemed city of academia and learning as outraged locals, students and activists alike attempt to stop the environmental disaster.

Since January 4th, efforts have been stepped up, no doubt inspired by one Giles Chamberlain who took residence in a one hundred-year-old sycamore in Bonn Square, where he managed to stay for over two weeks until effectively starved down by police who stopped all attempts to assist him (see Crap arrest).

Jan 9th saw a day of action back at the Westgate site where trees were also being cleared. Work was temporarily stopped and a plane tree occupied for 24 hours. Jan 12th saw over 100 people reclaim Bonn Square in a feisty protest which even saw one of the green local councillors arrested. Over 3500 leaflets were handed out and with support from local shoppers and passers-by, people managed to block the council from fencing off the site and forced work to stop.

Giles eventually came down voluntarily on Jan 20th just as an eviction order was granted. Within half an hour of the court judgement, the corporate chainsaw crew were in Bonn Square to demolish the last remaining natural beauty there. Scuffles ensued when one activist climbed onto a wood shredder and then jumped on to the side of the truck carrying the remains of the tree. Activists then wrestled with security thugs trying to drag him off. Police moved in and arrested the stuntman and one of his helpers.

Tuesday 21st saw an invasion of John Lewis' headquarters by activists keen to point out to the retailers the errors of their ways. Also this week, many of the remaining trees in the area have suddenly appeared sporting painted 'S's on their trunks, along with a warning that trees have been spiked. The idea is to make chainsaw operators think twice before attempting to saw through wood which contains metal, which could damage their equipment and dangerously throw the blade off line. And the protests look set to

continue as the crazy development develops. Much of the more effective action is emanating from the Oxford Action Resource centre. Email: oarc@lists.riseup.net web: theoarc.org.uk. For an explanation of the 'white S' action, see www.saveoxtrees.wordpress.com

*In other bad news for the Oxford environment, Jan 14th was the council hearing to reconsider the idea of letting Npower use Radley Lakes as a dumping ground for toxic ash (see SchNEWS 573). Predictably, despite 104 objections raised by the Environment Agency and the Save Radley Lakes campaign, supported by 500 individual objections, the council, er, decided all is well with plan and its go go go! The campaign is now preparing to push for a judicial review but we're not exactly holding our breath and the resistance will likely have to get a bit more direct... See www.saveradleylakes.org.uk

...and finally...

After Al Gore and his big movie, you might wonder why the American voting public are waking up and demanding enough action on climate change. Surely public concern will have pushed this issue much higher up the news agenda and the 'forth estate' public guardians at the national media would be grilling all presidential candidates on their green credentials? Er, you must be joking.

The Save Our Environment group analysed all questions put to the electioneering sleaze bags by the top five network news presenters since Jan 2007. Out of 2679 questions asked a mere three mentioned global warming. They were far more likely to be put on the spot about tough subjects like UFO's, baseball and Chuck Norris. God bless America! Come back Pants Paxman all is forgiven (well, except for your habit of repeatedly pressing on one only marginally relevant point and running out of time before really getting to the heart of the issue).

For a slightly amusing video piece highlighting the lack of scrutiny, see www.ga3.org/campaign/media_alert/w87s7wkrv75b3i83

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SchNEWS warns all readers - the Party and Protest column will return...Honest!

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