

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER PUBLISH AND BE DAMMED...

Weekly SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 18th April 2008

Free/Donation

Issue 629

MAYAN THE FORCE BE WITH YOU FIGHTING A NEW DAM IN GUATEMALA

In the Quiche region of northern Guatemala, on the border with Mexico, lies the isolated Ixcán Municipality. It is home to around 75,000 indigenous Mayans who are mostly subsistence farmers. The area is beautiful, green and lush, characterised by rushing rivers and jungles rich in biodiversity. Unfortunately for the indigenous population, the area also contains many of Guatemala's most coveted natural resources - oil, gold, land perfect for large scale sugar cane plantations for biofuel production and rivers with the potential for massive energy production.

One of these, the Chixoy River, is the controversial proposed location for what would be Guatemala's largest hydroelectric development. If built, the dam is set to flood an area of 7.5km², displacing at least 3000 people and destroying the agricultural land and livelihoods of around 6-8000. Directly through the construction of the dam, and indirectly through relocation of the resident communities, the project will irrevocably alter the ecology of the area. Thousands living downstream of the flooded area will also be adversely affected as their primary water source is reduced drastically. Unsurprisingly, the plan is meeting huge resistance from the Ixcán population.

The dam is just one part of the hugely controversial Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). Initiated in 2001, PPP is a regional integration project for Central America involving large scale infrastructure projects aimed at facilitating "free trade" (see SchNEWS 440). Advocates state that the plan aims to "develop" Latin America, but with 92% of the \$5 billion budget allocated for transportation and electrification initiatives, designed primarily to aid resource extraction and transportation of raw materials and sweatshop produced consumer products from the region, the only real development will be in the profits of big business.

DAMMED IF YOU DO

In the US, in March 2006 at the Forum of Latin American Leadership, the Xalala dam was promoted to potential foreign investors as one of the 50 largest projects planned in Latin America. Once functioning, annual net profit of the project is predicted to be US\$100-150 million. And following two favourable changes of law in the past few years, the project is now looking for a new slew of investors. In the late 1990s, the rate of tax demanded from the Guatemalan government from private corporations fell from a draconian 6% to a mere 1%. Sweet! Then, and at the end of the last government, a law was rushed through which removed obligatory impartial assessments of

the effects of mega projects and enables the corporation set to profit from the development to carry out all the social and environmental impact studies themselves! Even sweeter!

As with all the mega projects of the PPP, proponents claim that the Xalala dam will bring "development" to the region. The (Guatemalan) National Institute of Electrification (INDE) states that the dam will generate cheap and clean electricity, help Guatemala become self sufficient in its energy needs - and generate capital through sales of the electricity to other countries. However, for the 88% of the region's population who live in poverty, lacking both running water and electricity, losing their lands and resources to provide electricity for far away countries and profit for a MNC is a strange definition of development.

DAMMED IF YOU DON'T

The communities set to be affected initially attempted to resist the development through constitutional channels. Convention 169 of the International Labor Organisation is an international agreement (ratified by Guatemala in 1997) designed to protect the rights of indigenous communities. It states both that "governments should respect and protect the property rights and possession of lands that are traditionally occupied by indigenous people" and that "governments must consult the affected communities before authorising any program that plans to exploit the natural resources in their territories."

In April 2007, a Consulta Popular (referendum) was held in the Ixcán on both the construction of the Xalala Dam and whether to grant permission for oil exploration and extraction in the region. Of the 19,911 people who participated, 91% rejected both developments. But of course, there is little hope that the government will listen to the people.

All in the region remember only too well the Rio Negro massacres of 1982 where over 400 people were killed when they refused to leave their homes to allow the development of the Chixoy Dam. Today, the survivors are still awaiting promised reparations from INDE and the World Bank (who financed the project) and, with bitter irony, the communities next to this giant power plant are still without electricity. While the genocide that occurred in the 80s may be over, the future of those in the vicinity of the proposed Xalala dam doesn't look bright.

On October, 29th, 2005 Maynor López of, Gran Alianza Nacional (one of Guatemala's main political parties) said, "Where we plan to



CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For dragon it out...

One artistic beach bum got busted by Spanish cops - for building a life-sized sand-dragon on the beach. In Nerja, on the Costa del Sol, dragon-slaying costa cops decided that his scaly masterpiece was just too large and not content with waiting for the tide to wash it away - or just kicking the sand in his face - decided to nick the sculptor for causing a nuisance. Exactly who found the dragon a nuisance was never specified but it's creator was held in the cells for six hours.

Banning enjoyable (but sadly not profitable) activities from the beach has been a bit of a theme for the authorities in Nerja, who have recently introduced new laws against camping, fires or dogs on the beach - all part of a campaign of gentrification of the area, need to attract nice middle class tourists and their wallets...

build the dam, there is only the jungle, inhabited by wild animals... We hope, when the construction starts no NGO comes to save the animals." In May 2006, the former President of Guatemala Oscar Berger also denied the communities' existence, stating in a national newspaper that the area was well suited for dam development because it was so sparsely populated.

When the communities and NGOs have contacted government officials for information, none has been forthcoming. With growing frequency helicopters fly over the region and armed men threaten the people. Over the past few years, the local Mayor and his office, who oppose the development, have been subject to regular attacks, including attempted kidnappings, burning of municipal buildings and attacks on workers. These events are reported to the justice authorities but no action has ever been taken.

The 31st of July is the final date for offers from companies wishing to construct and operate the Xalala dam and the winner will be announced on the 1st September. While it is unlikely the project will be halted through official channels, the development is not yet a fait accompli for corporate interests.

Following the indigenous communities return to the region after the civil war, the area has the highest level of community organisation in the country. There are numerous agricultural cooperatives, human rights organisations and womens groups and these groups are working together to oppose both the Xalala dam and other PPP developments. The coalition is impressive and as the communities prepare for the long haul to protect their land, homes and resources it seems unlikely they will be defeated easily.

* To keep up with this and other Latin American news see www.narconews.com

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

Copyright
Published in Brighton since 1994

SEALED FATE?

Armed forces of the Canadian Coastguard stormed the Sea Shepherd ship the Farley Mowat on Saturday 4th. Following the successful intervention against the Japanese whaling fleet in the Antarctic Ocean - which saw the whaling fleet only achieve half of the kills they intended (See SchNEWS 616) Sea Shepherd put to sea again, this time in the Northern Hemisphere, to take on the harp seal slaughter in Canada's Gulf of St Lawrence.

Under Canadian law it is illegal to document the seal hunt. Fearful of the kind of backlash which took place when Greenpeace exposed the baby seal cull back in the seventies, the Canadian Government has gone to great lengths to ensure that no-one gets to produce evidence of the sealers' grisly work. On 31st March a coastguard vessel rammed the Farley Mowat twice in an effort to prevent them sailing towards the killing floes, where the sealers take advantage of the whelping season to slaughter the adult seals.

According to Sea Shepherd, "At around 0700 Hours (PST) and 1100 Hours Atlantic time on Saturday, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society vessel Farley Mowat was attacked by officers from two Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers the Des Groseilliers and the Sir Wifred Grenfell. Captain Alex Cornelissen informed the boarders that the Farley Mowat is a Dutch registered ship in international waters and that Canada had no legal right to restrict the free passage of the vessel through international waters."

Captain Paul Watson was speaking by phone with Farley Mowat communications officer Shannon Mann when he heard the voices of men screaming for the crew to fall to the floor. The men carried guns according to Mann and could be heard by Captain Watson threatening the Farley Mowat's crew. There are 17 crewmembers onboard the conservation ship from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, South Africa, Canada and the United States.

Following the payment of \$10,500 the ship's captain and first officer were released from custody and deported back to Sweden and the Netherlands. The Farley Mowat remains impounded - her fate uncertain. See www.seashepherd.org

BOXING CLEVER

Pack away your TV, DVD players, laptops and MP3s - next week is **Mental Detox Week**. In a valiant attempt to save us all from being dunderheaded pleasure monkeys staring empty-eyed at the idiot box, Adbusters have rebranded their annual TV Turn Off week to again challenge people to live without their gizmos and gadgets for a whole 7 days. The hope is that people will realise just how addicted they are to the mindless crap served up and will use the newly found time to read a book, take up a hobby, or get themselves a life. Who knows, if you can hack it for the whole week, you might kick the TV habit altogether.

In solidarity SchNEWS will next week be produced not on computers but on papyrus scrolls and with messages sent by carrier pigeon.

Visit www.adbusters.org/metapsycho/mdw to find out more and www.tvbgone.com/cfe_tvbg_main.php if you want to get others (involuntarily) involved.

LOOK WHO'S FALKING

The United Nations (remember them? They're the ones who come up with great sounding rhetoric and resolutions about human rights, freedom and the equality of mankind, and whom everyone then ignores) have been ruffling a few Israeli feathers of late.

The current UN Human Rights Council investigator into the systematic Israeli oppression of Palestine (see SchNEWS 627) has been fairly 'withering' about it (according to the pull-all-their-punches BBC) - but the next man lined up to take the job, Professor Richard Falk, has gone the whole hog and (quite rightly) drawn the obvious parallels with those-who-must-never-be-mentioned, the Nazis.

In an essay published last year, he said that Israel was creating a "Holocaust in the making" in Gaza and foreign governments should be intervening. Of course, these words are not so different from those of Israeli deputy defence minister, Matan Vilnai, who back in February threatened the Palestinians with a 'bigger holocaust.'

Perhaps unsurprisingly, his comments have gone down like a damaged helicopter gunship with the Israeli state, who say they will ban him from entering the country unless the UN change his mandate (due for review in September) to also investigate Palestinian human rights violations (or presumably ditch him and install someone more friendly).

But, himself an American Jew, Falk walks the talk and has stuck to his guns, pointing out that if his comments has been about the way "China was dealing with Tibet or the Sudanese government was dealing with Darfur, I think there would be no reluctance to make that comparison", and that the problem was really the historical sensitivity of the Jewish people, and Israel's tactic of using this to avoid having their policies held up to international law and morality.

Will the UN bottle it and give the job to someone else? Will Falk be the fall guy? Watch this space...

PARTY & PROTEST

* For full listings updated weekly see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

Red faces all round amongst the management of American retail predator 'Wal-Mart' (owners of ASDA in the UK) - and not just 'cos they've been drinking trebles all round to celebrate their latest expansion. Well actually, if they have, that could be the problem because evidence of their backroom shenanigans may be about to go public.

Back in the 70's, Walmart hired a small video company in Kansas to record all the company's meetings for internal archival purposes - presumably a fairly incriminating library of corporate corruption, callousness and crude behaviour.

Then, in 2006 it fired the firm, Flagler - but without checking the deal's small print, or lack of it. In fact the company had no written contract at all and, therefore, no ownership rights to any of the footage as copyright law, by default, gives all rights to whoever recorded it.

After negotiations for Walmart to buy the rights back stalled - Flagler had asked for the

CALL TO ARMS

On Monday, the arms manufacturer Raytheon's facility in Glenrothes, Scotland, was blockaded for the day when six people locked on for eight hours. Police cutting teams struggled to cut through the lock-ons. All six were charged with a Breach of the Peace, and held in the cells overnight.

The group, not affiliated to any one organisation, locked on in opposition to Raytheon's "destructive pursuit of corporate self-interest." US arms giant Raytheon are involved in starting a new arms race with the "Star Wars" programme. One of EDO MBM's biggest clients, they make the GPS-aided navigation system and control systems for the Paveway guided "bunker busting" bombs produced in the US - and sold to Israel, who used them in their war on Lebanon. The Paveway was also used extensively in the Iraq war with over 8,700 being dropped. They also manufacture munitions that carry cluster bombs. For pics see <http://scotland.indymedia.org/newswire/display/5525/index.php>

Like a verge-on... censored for the very first time...

'On The Verge' on tour

The Smash EDO tour continues its way around the country - with discussions and screenings of the film they tried to ban... April dates:

- 18 - **Glasgow**, the Carnival Arts Centre
- 19 - **Aberdeen** Uni. Taylor building, A21, 7pm
- 21 - **London** Activist Resource Centre.
- 22 - **Leeds**. The Peanut Gallery Social Centre, Leeds Uni Social Centre. 6pm
- 23 - **Nottingham** Uni Park campus. 7pm and St. Andrews Uni **Edinburgh**
- 24 - **Warwick** Uni
- 25 - **Sheffield** Uni Lecture theatre 3, Sheffield Uni Arts Tower, 4-6.30pm
- 27 - **Leeds** Common Place, 23-25 Wharf St, LS2 7EQ. 0845 345 7334 www.thecommonplace.org.uk
- 28 - **Manchester** Uni, Students union, Oxford Rd. 7.30pm
- 29 - **Lancaster** Gregson Centre 7pm
- 30 - **Kingston** Uni and **Newport**. Police are still harassing the film so check website for sudden venue changes.

www.smashedo.org.uk

...and finally...

cheeky sum of \$150,000,000, Wal-mart countered with \$500,000, Flager agreed to go to a mere \$145,000,000 (some gap to bridge there then!) - Flager are now responding by making the footage available to all-comers.

The archive offers a rare inside view of the workings of a multinational ethic-lite corporate profit-machine - and makes interesting watching for people with a grudge against the mega-supermarket chain. Lawyers for unions and private cases like sexual discrimination have been first in the queue, eager for the damning candid camerawork of things like a senior manager parading around in drag, others mocking women and top executives in full'n frank discussions about corporate strategy and hiring practices.

It would surely be a goldmine for an activist documentary maker - shame the video scoundrels want \$250 hour for access...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - who said globalised capitalism doesn't give a dam? Honestly!

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk