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SECTS AND THE CITY

CULT FRICTION AS POLICE HARASS ANTI-SCIENTOLOGY PROTEST...

City of London police have been cracking down hard on religious intolerance this week and on one four letter word in particular – CULT. And when does the word cult become illegal? Curiously only when it's applied to the Church of Scientology (CoS) - and in the Square Mile.

Around two-hundred anti-Scientology protesters gathered outside the CoS London base on Queen Victoria Street last Saturday as part of a day of action. Sporting Guy Fawkes masks, many carried signs accusing the organisation of being a cult. They were greeted by a number of City of London Police.

At 11.20, two officers approached one 15-year-old who was wearing a huge-nosed mask and holding a sign saying "Scientology is not a religion – it is a dangerous cult". He was handed a pre-printed warning by a WPC stating, "The sign you are displaying commits an offence under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 .. you are strongly advised to remove the sign with immediate effect". He riposted with a verbatim quote from a verdict given by Justice Latey in 1984 "Some might regard this as an extension of the entertaining science fiction which Hubbard used to write before he invented and founded the cult .. Scientology is both immoral and socially obnoxious."

One cop (A747) told SchNEWS' man on the scene that, "the idea is that if somebody gets prosecuted there will be a test case" Police were clearly out to protect CoS's reputation with one officer telling us, "Our solicitors at the Crown Prosecution Service have advised us that any signs saying 'Scientology is a cult' could be deemed offensive." He added "They are being treated as a religious organisation for the purposes of today".

Ten minutes later and the cops returned. The youth was chased up an alleyway and then forced to hand over his details for a court summons.

So why the sudden desire to defend Scientology so strenuously? One explanation is that a lifetime's exposure to masonic ceremony has made London's top cops a little more suggestible than the rest of us. Might they now be being sucked in by cult founder L. Ron Hubbard's daffy load of old cobblers?

CRUISE CONTROL?

A more mundane explanation is that CoS has been very generous to our friends in blue. They're not short of a few quid - after all Hubbard himself pointed out "If a man really wants to make a million dollars he should start his own religion." Basic introductory sessions for Scientology cost up to £80. the next costs £300 etc etc. In October, a £24 million Scientology centre opened in the heart of London's Square Mile, one of 30 "mis-

sions" in the country, including a massive HQ in East Grinstead. Up to 20 officers in the City of London Police - from constables to superintendents - have accepted hospitality worth thousands from CoS, including invites to a £500-a-head charity dinner where the guest of honour was Tom Cruise. One senior police officer appeared in a Church of Scientology video and another, Chief Superintendent Kevin Hurley, spoke at the opening of the new "mission" saying the cult was "raising the spiritual wealth of society".

Two hours later, a similar demo was held, but this time outside the City Police's jurisdiction. A bunch of 'cults' on signs were evident but the Met, perhaps as yet unconverted, had no corresponding mind-yer-language problem.

Whatever the dubious nature of the hand-in-glove relations between the City cops and the cranks, their pre-meditated use of police powers to crackdown on freedom of speech at demos fails to reflect the 'inalienable rights to expression' or brotherhoodly love preached by the cultists...

* For more from the shadowy 'Anonymous' group keen to help out by bringing down the dodgy sect, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

Britain's longest running animal rights trial is nearing its end after 18 weeks. The result has serious implications for civil liberties. As we reported back in SchNEWS 616 seven defendants were on trial under the new SOCPA Laws for campaigning against Ledbury animal testing laboratory Sequani. As of going to press one man, Sean Kirtley has received a guilty verdict while three others were acquitted and two are still awaiting a verdict. (One plead guilty early in proceedings in attempt to strike a bargain). Sean has now been remanded to HMP Winson Green in Birmingham.

The seven were initially busted two years ago in Operation Tornado, which has ended up costing £4m (2% of the entire police budget for West Mercia for that year). Police seized computers, phones, personal mail and clothing from houses and workplaces They even seized a packet of Rizla!

The case taken out under section 145 of SOCPA, which makes it illegal to 'Interference with contractual relationships so as to harm animal research organisation' The interesting twist is that instead of a straightforward charge the activists were charged with conspiracy, which not only carries a heavier sentence but allows a much broader range of evidence in.1000s of hours of video footage and a detailed analysis of mobile phone records was used to try and build a picture of a hierarchy within the campaign. Based on records of who called who and when police tried to build a picture of how the campaign was structured. Defendants were asked to provide reasons for virtually every phone call they'd made to each other. One supporter told us "They've built a ludicrously skewed picture on what were effectively phone calls between a group of friends – they were desperate to place Sean as the leader – he's no such thing".

There was no evidence of intimidation or harassment or section 5 style offences by Sean Kirtley although he has now been found guilty as

he was seen as the organiser of most of the demonstrations and was considered by police to be "number 1". The main plank of the evidence was that forensics from his home computer showed that he had updated the campaign website.

Despite being a keen foxhunter and paid up member of pro-shooting lobby-group BASC, Judge Ross refused to step down. His involvement in the killing of animals and obvious opposition to the idea of animal welfare (never mind animal rights) would have on many levels affected his judgement. The trial went ahead under a fearsome set of reporting restrictions. The jury were bussed in on a daily basis and told that they could be a target for animal rights extremists. At the same time in the same building murder trial witnesses and jury members had to make their own way into the court.

People were frisked as they entered the public gallery and some were ejected for wearing "animal rights" clothing – even down to a shirt which read "Vegan". One campaigner told us "Human rights organisation Liberty were hassled constantly by ourselves and other activists to get them to shed light on what we could see would be a time bomb clusterfuck for movements other than our own. They told us they were too busy."

Our court correspondent told us "So to sum up, Sean Kirtley is in prison and facing a possible 5 year sentence for holding placards, attending demonstrations just because people phoned him and said, "shall we go and demo Sequani this weekend". He was not the organiser but it was far too much of an efficient campaign to go unnoticed by those who stand to profit from vivisection. The campaign is not over, a change of tactics is being strongly discussed within our group and we plan on taking the fight to new levels over the coming months."

* See also <http://sequani.wordpress.com>
* Send mail to Sean Kirtley WC6977, HMP Birmingham Prison, Winson Green Road, Birmingham, B18 4AS

BASILDON FAULTY

Dale Farm, a large traveller community living on land they own – albeit without planning permission – near Wickford, Essex (see SchNEWS 578), won an important court decision last week. A judicial review at the High Court has halted Basildon Council's plan to evict the 86 families – effectively a village of 1000 people – and also ordered them to find an alternative site for the residents. This comes after the council ordered the travellers to leave because they didn't have planning permission in 2005.

Justice Andrew Collins came out against the draconian and ethnic-cleansing aspects of the Dale Farm eviction, saying that the travellers are victims of a 'high degree of prejudice', and were only on this site because they couldn't find land elsewhere. Collins rebuked Basildon for not finding alternative land for the community, and also urged the council to not use the bailiff firm Constant & Co – the self-proclaimed 'Gypsy eviction specialists' (See SchNEWS 519) – after seeing their violent handywork in a video of another eviction.

Meanwhile at Dale Farm, a new community/IT centre has also opened, called St Christophers, which has been built using a £12,000 grant from the Essex Racial Equality Council – without planning permission, yet opened by a member of the House Of Lords, and blessed by a local

GAGGED AND BOUND OVER

Fellow anarcho-scribes at the Cardiff based *Gagged* newsletter have landed in hot water after offending the high-and-mighty in the Torfaen area. In issue 23 under the SchNEWS-worthy headline "Hip-Hip Hooray", they reported how the family of local councillor Rosemary Seabourne had secured a £63,000 grant for an extension to their house to help care for her grandchild – who suffers from Perthe's syndrome, a debilitating disorder but temporary and not that unusual. Apparently there are four other cases in the ward.

Gagged suggested that healthcare in the area was perhaps more equal for some than others. Cue a pre-action letter from Steel & Shamash solicitors demanding an apology. Not from whoever wrote the article, whose identity remains shrouded in mystery, but from one man who was merely delivering the newsletter. The letter threatens that he

POWER TO THE STEEPLE

Early on Monday morning a stand-off was playing itself out on the streets of Brighton as sweating police and bailiffs scratched their meaty chins and wondered what to do as a group of squatters stood defiant, refusing the eviction order handed down to them on the 2nd of May. A large group of intrigued onlookers gathered on the busy road and people driving past beeped their support; as police retaliated with their usual blend of surveillance and harassment, arresting a passer-by seemingly for using deodorant! The occupiers, locked on and barricaded in, weren't intimidated and by late afternoon the police gave up and left them to it.

The Methodist Church on London road was opened up for the Days of Action for Autonomous Spaces and has been used for the first time in years to host workshops, film screenings, free food and prop making. Despite attempts to contact the Methodists, who invest in companies such as BP, GlaxoSmithKline and Nestlé, the Christian corporation refused to honour their pledge to support "community development for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor".

As supplies are hoisted in from supporters by basket, the "siege of London Road" looks set to continue. The occupiers vow to keep using the space for the benefit of the community and have been putting on regular free cafés on the street outside to spread awareness of their cause, as well as related housing and social issues.

* Watch this space for further reports www.myspace.com/88londonroadsquat

Catholic priest. Local MP for Billericay, John Baron, predictably came out on the side of the tax-paying rednecks, saying that "...supporting a community centre on an illegal site shows a clear bias and discriminates against the law-abiding majority. The Equality Council should provide fairness for all. By backing this centre, it has contributed to community tensions."

But Europe-wide support is building for Dale Farm. Today (16th) Richard Sheridan, president of the Gypsy Council, will speak about it at a Russian-organised conference to protect ethnic minorities in Europe. Dale Farm residents have been to other gypsy/roma sites in Spain, Italy and Germany, and several are due to visit Essex including Roma MPs from Serbia. Next month as part of national Gypsy Month, Romani's from Turkey will and discuss twinning Dale Farm with Europe's oldest Roma community, Sulukule in Istanbul.

Up against fervent 'not-in-our-back-yard', racist campaigns and council prejudice around the country, the claim of 'ethnic cleansing' is apt seeing as traditional travelling communities are continually kicked off sites and not catered for with council park-up land. Their only recourse is to buy land and move onto it – as happened at Dale Farm – with or without planning permission.

* See www.gypsy-traveller.org

committed 'libel by dissemination' and demands an immediate apology 'in terms to be approved by us'. SchNEWS isn't going to speculate about the intricacies of local government in Wales but isn't this a bit like suing a paper-boy for lurid speculation in the tabloids?

The letter then bizarrely blames the messenger for a totally un-connected hate mail sent to another councillor in the ward and suggests he might be liable for prosecution under the Protection from Harassment Act. He's been given 'til the 6th May to answer.

Dai Bach, spokesman for *Gagged* told SchNEWS "Basically Labour got annihilated in the local elections and they're looking for someone to blame. Rosemary lost her seat and now she's lost her rag. But they'll never take us alive, boyo."

* <http://www.myspace.com/gaggednewsletter>

CLUSTER'S LAST STAND

The Oslo Process has been quietly ticking away in the Norwegian capital, aiming to ban cluster munitions. 85 countries have attended, including several that make and use cluster munitions (such as our own dear government). But the biggest users, Israel and the US, have steered well clear of the conference. Israel saturated southern Lebanon with bomblets after it was clear that they'd lost their war against Hizballah and they're still killing and maiming nearly two years later.

The UK government, along with Germany, Denmark, France and Holland have been described as the 'foxes in the chickenhouse' by anti-arms trade groups, and their presence at the talks aimed at watering down any resolutions to limit states from continuing to commit mass murder without breaking international law. For example, Britain would like the M85 cluster bomb (which they bulk bought from Israel to use against Iraq in 2003) to be exempt as it contains high tech fuses ensuring it detonates on impact (although they didn't work in Lebanon). Additionally, the British say that the CRV-7 Hydra can't be considered a cluster munition because it contains only nine bomblets – the ministry does not consider a weapon with less than ten worthy of labelling a cluster.

With tactics like this it's little wonder it looks like the conference will die a death. But of course as we all know, relying on states to police themselves is a recipe for tragedy.

BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

The latest in the slew of government hi-tech IT projects pretending to save millions – but in fact costing a whole lot more – hits a sinister note with £1.5 million going to fifteen local authorities to test voice analysis technology in order to detect alleged benefits fraud. The technology supposedly detects tell-tale changes in a caller's voice – using mathematical formulas – and telephone operators will be trained in questioning techniques and behavioural analysis. A trial run by Harrow Council and Capita in 2007 claims that people withdrew from benefits – potentially to avoid fraud cases.

The anti-fraud minister at the Dept of Work & Pensions, James Plaskitt, said that "We need to continue to do more to make sure that the taxpayers' money always goes to those who need it most." That is, corporations hoovering up privatisation contracts, such as Capita...

* Today, workers will go out on strike from the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union – including Job centre, Ofsted, child support and pensions service staff – over paltry pay conditions. These employees are at the frontline, working to provide business with cheap workers, but are themselves of course subject to the same job-market forces.

P&G TIPS

This week saw the annual global day of boycotting those purveyors of fine carcinogenic chemical-based products, Proctor & Gamble. The veteran vivisectionists test a number of their products on animals, including their Iams cat food. The UK banned animal tests for cosmetics in 1999, but the company simply took their pet poisoning to foreign shores. Now that the European Union has voted to ban these trials, P&G look set to go even further and take them outside of the EU. The Global Boycott Day was there to encourage others to quit mindlessly buying their poisoning, Earth-aping wares (Flash, Ariel, Crest, Pringles etc). Boycott P&G hope that enough people doing so will hurt the massive corporation in the only place it hurts – sadly not their eyes as SchNEWS administers a pipette of nitric acid – but their pockets.

* See www.boycottpandg.co.uk and www.pg.com for a comprehensive list of what not to buy...

...and finally...

Of course in the U.K we are a little more choosy about turning sci-fi epics into religion. Far bigger than mere Scientology, in the 2001 census nearly 400,000 – nearly 1% of the population – stuck their religion down as "Jedi" While few of those have successfully harnessed the force (next to which, the ability to destroy a planet is insignificant, of course), this hasn't stopped three enthusiastic converts in Anglesey, from setting up their own 'Church of Jediism' to meet others and 'learn the ways' together. They quickly gained some 30 devotees – which makes them the fastest growing U.K cult.

But the way of the jedi knight no easy road is. The harmless church social club obviously stirred the dark side of the local community and one man, Arwel Wynne Hughes, in particular. Having downed 10 litres of cheap wine (from the local Death-Spar, no doubt) he gave in to hatred and anger and – improvising a Darth Vader outfit from a bin-liner – attacked the Jedi with a crutch, bashing one over the head and bruising another's leg. Presumably they hadn't felt the disturbances in the force until too late.

But the Force works in mysterious ways and the video camera they'd set up to film themselves enacting a light-sabre fight (sacred church ritual no doubt) fortunately caught the whole thing, and this week the errant Sith-head was given a suspended sentence and fined for his wheeze...

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers – we're not a sinister cult, we're a pseudo-non-hierarchical rhizomatic horizontal collective. Honest!

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