



WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER KURDISH-DAM *

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TURKISH DELIGHT

"The prime minister is backing a project that would be a disaster for the environment, a tragedy for local people, and a threat to peace."

Tony Juniper, Friends of the Earth

SchNEWS ain't having a Turkish ** but the planned Ilisu Dam, in South-East Turkey could well be "the biggest corruption scandal in western Europe" (George Monbiot). The hydro-electric dam will flood 52 Kurdish villages and 15 towns. One of these is Hasankeyf, one of the most ancient settlements in the world. It is the only town in the region to survive the middle ages, protected so tightly by planning laws that hotels are not even allowed to be built for the hordes of visiting tourists. The Kurds regard this city as their cultural heartland and see this project as a political tool to continue to ethnically cleanse them from Turkey. One angry Kurd commented "By destroying Hasankeyf, they hope to eliminate our history". About 16,000 Kurds are expected to lose their homes and land without compensation, and another 20,000 will have their lives disrupted. At least 19 Kurdish villages in the reservoir area have already been cleared at gunpoint and then burnt. Disagreeing with the dam's construction has been outlawed. Surprise, surprise, there is no resettlement package for the ousted.

There is also the added fear that Turkey will have the means to cut off the water supply to Syria and Iraq once the dam is built. This issue has already been identified as a potential cause of war in the region. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former secretary-general of the UN has stated that, "The next war in the Middle East will be fought over water, not politics."

Top cabinet ministers, including Robin Cook, Stephen Byers and fat controller John Prescott, have advised against the dam. Even those environmentally challenged people at the World Bank are refusing to have anything to do with the project. The Bank admits that the plan violates the UN Convention drawn up to prevent border disputes and wars between states that share water resources. If it violates World Bank 'ethical' policy (!), just who is prepared to get involved...and why?!

Balfour Beatty and Tony Blair...come on down!!

Balfour Beatty have become the New chums of the Labour crew. One of its executives was seconded to the Dept of Trade and Industry's "innovation unit" as soon as Labour won the general election. Additionally, Sir Malcolm Bates, architect of the Private Finance Initiative (see SchNEWS 219), and one of Blair's heroes, was chosen as the ideal man to chair London Transport. Until his appointment, he was a director of BICC- the parent company of Balfour Beatty. Oooh.. what nasty tangled webs they weave!

If you are asking who Balfour Beatty are, they are the lovely company that built roads as the A30 in Devon. They also played a similar part in the Pergau Dam fiasco in Malaysia, which never worked but gave the government the opportunity to sell the Malaysians arms.

As for Tony Blair's involvement... issues such as Turkey's desire to become part of the European Union, and the fear of losing money gained by extensive arms sales to a Nato ally were clearly too pressing for him to risk upsetting the Turkish Government. Don't worry about the 20,000 people set to have their lives disrupted, Tony, we're sure they'll manage somehow!

In order for the Ilisu dam to comply with European Law, the government needed to provide an environmental assessment of the dam. The documents revealed the devastating environmental impact of the dam and the expected human rights violations. But all this now means nothing as the final environmental assessment report will be prepared by none other than... Balfour Beatty!!

* **Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Trade Union Group**, 42 Southall Court, Lady Margaret Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB1 2RQ, Tel: 0171 250 1317

* **Recommended reading:**
Arundhati Roy, 'The Greater Common Good' Patrick McCully, 'Silenced Rivers'

Feeling outraged at these projects? Did you realise that you have, and will be, actually helping to fund them? Welcome to the world of the Export Credit Guarantee Department.

This is a cheeky little scam that provides insurance for companies operating abroad. If the host country doesn't pay, the agency, meaning the taxpayers foot the bill. The Department then uses its muscle, backed by the govt, to force the reluctant country to reimburse it with interest effectively acting as a global debt collector for British corporations.

The Department kindly refuses to take social, human or environmental rights into account preferring to leave it up to the host country. George Monbiot has described them as, "the biggest threat to sustainability and social justice on earth... It pursues it's money with ruthless determination, even when the debts were incurred for projects crawling with corporate corruption. It is responsible for 95% of the debt owed by Southern countries to the British Government."

Want to hear more? This nasty, secretive little lot is at present backing two nuclear power plants in China and supported the Nathpa Dam in India - environmental destruction, social displacement, all the usual lovely things. And it gets worse! British Aerospace's sale of 40 Hawk jets to Indonesia was insured by the Department.

DAMNED STUPID

Another controversial dam is the one on the Narmada River in India, turning the valley into a series of reservoirs. It will affect the lives of 25 million people who live in the valley, and will submerge and destroy 4,000 square kilometres of deciduous woodland. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) have been fighting against the proposed dams for the past 14 years. Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winning author who was arrested last week for her part in the anti-dam demonstrations, describes the effects of such developments in her book 'The Greater Common Good', "Big Dams are obsolete... They're undemocratic... There was a time when Big Dams moved men to poetry. Not any longer. All over the world there is a movement growing against Big Dams".

SchNews Vocab Watch

* **Kurdish-Dam** is not Cockney Rhyming Slang for Kurdistan. Kurdistan is the area of land the Kurdish people have inhabited for over 4,000 yrs. It was carved up by French & British colonialists in a 1923 treaty after the collapse of the Ottoman empire to become parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

** **Turkish-Bath** - Cockney Rhyming Slang for Laugh

Occidental Damage

"We will in no way sell our Mother Earth, to do so would be to give up our work of collaborating with the spirits to protect the heart of the world, which sustains and gives life to the rest of the universe, it would be to go against our own origins, and those of all existence."

Statement of the U'wa People, August 1998.

The U'wa of the Colombian cloud forest are in a life-and-death struggle to protect their traditional culture and sacred homeland from Occidental (Oxy) Petroleum's proposed oil drill site. 200 of the U'wa people are occupying the drilling site and thousands more will join them at any sign of activity. The U'wa's opposition to the oil project is so strong that they have vowed to commit collective suicide if Occidental Petroleum and the Colombian government proceed with the project on their ancestral lands. Throughout Colombia, oil is linked with violence and terror.

The U'wa people's struggle exploded into the public arena last March with the murders in Colombia of three American indigenous rights activists. One of them Terence Freitas was a founder of the U'wa Defense Working Group and had devoted the last two years of his life to supporting the tribe in their campaign to stop Occidental's oil project.

"...we ask that our brothers and sisters from other races and cultures unite in the struggle that we are undertaking...we believe that this struggle has to become a global crusade to defend life." - Statement of the U'wa people

One of Occidental's largest shareholders is Boston-based financial giant Fidelity Investments. Fidelity have been given a deadline of the 1st March to either convince Occidental to cancel the project or show that they will not invest in genocide. Ironically, Fidelity's slogan is, "We help you invest responsibly."

There's a day of action on 3rd February. Further info: www.ran.org.

FISTFUL OF DOLLARS

The capital of Ecuador has been brought to a standstill by thousands of indigenous locals who are protesting against the worsening economic situation in the country. The local currency, the sucre has collapsed from being worth 7000 to the dollar, to over 25,000 and many previously owned state companies have been privatized in the pursuit of more profit. Indigenous people make up over a fifth of the population of Ecuador, but are among the most impoverished and repressed sections of society. The President of Ecuador also recently announced the 'dollarisation' of Ecuador's economy, meaning that the dollar would replace the sucre.

This was the final straw for millions who were fed up with the country's neo-liberal policies, and lack of real democracy. So they formed the confederation of the indigenous nationalities of Ecuador - CONAIE. This operates as an alternative people's parliament and believes in decentralizing power to the country's 21 regions. Mass protests are bringing the country to a standstill, with protestors blocking roads and teaming up with striking oil workers to try and cut off the country's fuel supplies. Over 45,000 cops and troops have been mobilized to confront the protestors in the capital, but the Indians are refusing to leave or to negotiate with the president, who they don't consider to be president anyway!

Info is still sketchy about just what is going on at the moment, but check out www.coli_uni-sb.de/~pietsch/kosovo/

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SchNEWS in brief

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, a former **Black Panther** who has previously been imprisoned for his struggle for the Black community, is coming to the UK as part of the MayDay 2000 Festival. He plans to do a tour speaking of his life, struggles and beliefs. If anyone is interested in arranging a venue or putting Lorenzo up during his stay, contact MayDay 2000, London WC1N 3XX, Tel: 020 8374 5027 ** There will be a public meeting entitled "**People and Protest**" discussing the war against capitalism with a slant on the Seattle protests. It's at 8pm on Thursday 3rd February at Middle Street Primary School Hall, Middle Street, Brighton.** The Museum of London is holding an unusually radical exhibition called "**Message to the Mayor: Don't Sterilise our City**". It plans to draw the Mayoral candidates' attentions to issues regarding the state of the city including 'Keep Our Capital Messy'. It runs from 11th Jan to 20th Feb. Tel: 0171 814 5500 ** An inquest into the murder of **Diarmuid O'Neill**, shot and killed by the Metropolitan Police during a raid on his home on 23rd September 1996, begins at Kingston Crown Court on Jan 31st. Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign, BM Box D. O'Neill, London WC1N 3XX.** The **Smash Genetix 20**, who were in court this week for a proposed three week trial over allegedly trashing an AgrEvo GM maize site last year, were out of court after 1 1/2 days! After a plea bargain, 11 were bound over to keep the peace for twelve months. The remaining nine received either one year conditional discharges, or £200 fines. ** There's a meeting against the **Terrorism Bill** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, 26th January, 6:30pm ** Campaign Against Arms Trade women's network are meeting on Saturday 29th 2-5 pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn to plan an event for **International Women's Day** in March Tel 0171 281 4369

GET OFF THE 28 BUS!

Outrage! are calling for a boycott of all Stagecoach bus and train services, after the companies chairman Brian Souter gave more than £500,000 through his charitable foundation to the Scottish Schoolboards Association. The money will fund a T.V. and advertising campaign against the repeal of section 28 in Scotland - the law which prevents schools and teachers promoting homosexuality.

Brian Souter's a lovely bloke: New Labour supporter, committed Christian, and rampant capitalist who has made his millions by buying up bus and rail systems as they become privatised, with operations in China, Brazil, U.S., Canada, and New Zealand.

An example of just how the firm made it's millions can be seen in Darlington, where a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report called their activities "predatory, deplorable and against the public interest". The 90-year-old municipal Darlington Transport found that its drivers were poached and Stagecoach arrived two minutes earlier at bus stops offering free trips. Darlington Transport went bust, Stagecoach raised the fares and cashed in.

Since then they've been the subject of 8 other reports from Monopolies & Mergers and 24 inquiries by the Office of Fair Trading.

Repeal of section 28 is supported by organisations like the Children First and Childline and most of MPs in the new Scottish parliament. But a spokesman for the Souter Foundation reckons that "this is about democracy." And moral decency perhaps as well? Something Souter and his Stagecoach cronies know all about.

PARTY ALL WEEKLONG!

It's been a good week to boogie, first we heard the government was gonna be gracious enough to allow us to dance on Sundays. The Home Office Minister responsible for relaxing the 200 year old Sunday Observance Act, obviously has the funk saying, "If people want a bit of Sunday night fever, that's fine with me." Better news was to come when Shane Collins, organiser of the May Day Cannabis Festival at Clapham Common, faced getting on down with a 6 months prison sentence and a £20,000 fine because people danced at last year's event without a license. On Thursday Shane was found not guilty and awarded court costs of two travelcards. (It's estimated Lambeth Council spent £12,000). He'll probably still be celebrating on the 6th May when the next 'Smokey Bear' festival will be held at Kennington Park.

* Boo! This years Ambient Picnic in Guildford has been cancelled by the Guildford Philharmonic (they have a concert the night before the Picnic and the Ambient organisers share the staging costs). Apparently, last year the Philharmonic went over-budget, and so have decided to have a "tribute-band" gig instead on the Sunday to pay off the debt.

CLIFF'S DYING FLAME

Plans for a Flame of Hope, lit by Sir Cliff Richard, that was to last all year to remind the people of Birmingham of Jesus Christ quickly burnt out when the beacon went out after just a couple of weeks because someone had forgotten to order enough gas! Prior to lighting the flame on New Year's Eve, an excited Cliff said "It's great to know that...a Flame of Hope will burn throughout the Millennium year." When SchNEWS spoke with Cliff this week, he told us, "The Church will always be full of gas, even if the bottle isn't." Never mind, Cliff, you could always take a match to 'Millennium Prayer' instead!

Davos Station

The city of Davos has announced that it won't tolerate planned protests during the week in which the **World Economic Forum** will meet at the Swiss winter resort (see Schnews 243.) Thousands of policemen, private security guards and military will transform this little place in the swiss mountains into a high security area. Anti-WTO-Koordination, a group based in Bern, has announced its protest "against this decision which is a clear violation of our civil rights." Demos are still planned for 29 January. Meet at Davos train station at 3 pm. www.reitschule.ch/reitschule/anti-wto or e-mail them at fantasia39@hotmail.com.

...and finally... Fucking Tourists

Tourists are causing a lot of anxiety - and are costing money - to a tiny village where signs keep disappearing. What do the signs read? "Welcome to Fucking, Austria."

Pronounced "fooking," the little hamlet of Fucking is named after the man who founded the village in the 6th century. His name? Focko.

The town sign has been stolen seven times in the last few months. With signs costing several hundred dollars apiece, much of the tiny town's budget is being spent replacing the signs, says Siegfried Hoepfel, the Mayor of Fucking. He went on to express his hope that further thefts will be avoided through the use of increased concrete and ... bigger screws.

disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers that those dam politicians are beavering away again so if you've got a reservoir of strength bung a cork in their sluice gate causing a log-jam.