



WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WE'RE NOT LICKED YET

# SchNEWS

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# POSTMAN SPLAT

"We are fundamentally a benefits post office, this decision will close me down, and the knock on effect will be devastating to the local community." Rod, Sub Postmaster, Brighton

"The government talks a lot about social exclusion and you don't get much more excluded than living in a village without any services."

David Mundell, Member of the Scottish Parliament

**A new Post Office Bill announced in parliament last week could lead to the closure of thousands of sub post offices, thanks to a decision to pay state benefits directly into bank accounts.**

The government's own figures show that nearly 8,000 of the 19,000 Post Offices in Britain are at least 40% reliant on income from dealing with benefits. The switch could sound the death knell to thousands.

SchNEWS visited our local sub post office in Sutherland Road which like the majority are small and independently owned. While we were there chatting to PHEME and Rod, about 20 people popped in - one person paid some bills, a couple bought stamps, the rest were all there to cash their benefits. But it is more than just a post office, it is a focal point for the community. Each person that came in was greeted by name, came to chat and exchange news, to ask advice or help in filling out forms. Sutherland Road postie also serves a large area where there is just one grocery store, a newsagents and a pub. All these undoubtedly benefit from people cashing pensions or unemployed cheques nearby.

The decision to use the new system will save the government around £400 million a year - if you don't take into account the loss of some 30,000 counter jobs and the knock on affect to local communities and the fact that even the government admit they might have to spend money subsidising post offices to keep them open.

New Labour has even admitted that the country needs to maintain a wide network of post offices, which is obviously why it has let around 200 sub post offices close every year since it has been in office.

Of course it's convenient for some people to get benefits paid into their bank account - but what if you're poor, old and

frail; there's no bank in your village, you don't have a car, and the bus service is non-existent?

While 60% of parishes still have post offices, only 5% have bank or building society branches - and the situation is set to get a lot worse. Even a new report from the British Bankers Association admitted that the elderly, people with mobility disabilities and women with young children faced difficulties getting to their nearest bank. 4,000 branches have closed since 1990, and the Campaign for Community Banking Services forecast that another one thousand communities will be "bankless" in the next five years.

So what's the answer. Well as Colin Baker, General Secretary of the National Federation of Sub-postmasters said, "The Government could build on sub post offices' ...making it the place to get information, check documents, pay for government services and find out about what you are entitled to."

And while SchNEWS would never be cynical about government policy, all European Union mail services face a radical shake up in readiness for 'liberalisation' of the European postal market in 2003. That's privatisation to you and me.

## Up Yer Privates!

New Labour are busy privatising everything - they just dress it up in fancy jargon to try to pull the wool over our eyes. But no more! Yer nosy-parker SchNEWS has decided to start a regular column, so if you know about dodgy Private Finance Initiative Schemes, Best Value nonsense, or whatever else let us know.

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK DJ GETS KNICKERED

A Brighton DJ, who wishes to remain anonymous, was arrested this week for being in possession of a pair of stolen Y Fronts. He rang SchNews and panted "How can I afford underwear on DJ's wages?" He is now looking for a brief to cover his case. \* Keep sending SchNEWS yer crap arrests!

## BIG MAC IN KIDS TAKEAWAY

"Head teachers are the key to the whole system-in the same way that a chief executive can be at a well-run company." Tony Blair

The biggest high-profile privatisation of education is happening in the same secondary schools Blair rejected for his own children. He obviously didn't realise that a super hero of a company, a pioneer of specialist needs education, a company that has worked in developing countries, is an organisation so ethically minded it provides school inspectors to Ofsted. (This is quite ironic considering this same bunch of hypocritical spell checkers must not fail its Ofsted inspection in any of its schools.)

So, who are they you may well ask.

Step forward Cambridge Education Associates, part of the Mott MacDonald Group, not to be confused with Ronald McDonald (one wears a clown's suit). Their vested interest in children's education became apparent at the McLibel Trial, where the Corporations Head of marketing from Chicago stated "Children were virgin ground as far as marketing is concerned". In the same way, C.E.A. obviously see the children of Tony Blair's former home of Islington as a developing market.

Estelle Morris, the School Standards Minister, managed to put parents' minds at rest by declaring "There will be no change of signs outside their children's schools". That's a bloody relief! We thought they would have gargantuan signs reading "CHILD EXPLOITATION TAKING PLACE HERE"

When SchNEWS asked Brian Oakley Smith, the Managing Director of C.E.A. a simple question - "What are you getting out of this?" the flustered reply was "We care." Yeah right! And I'm a pony's uncle. He then squeaked "We only get £600,000 a year, the other 15 million we just manage". Say what! C.E.A stand to loose £75,000 on each target it misses. That is of course if their own inspectors fail them. Mr Oakley was quick to point out "That's if the children don't reach their targets" It's the kid's fault already.

Old McDonald had a farm now he's got your kids.

Now, what is Mott MacDonald's interest in children's education? If we look at their past record we can see how relevant it is, for instance they educated people at the Newbury By Pass; Twyford Down; road building in Indonesia; rebuilding Kosovo; various dam projects and a military hospital in Malaysia. Oh! Nearly forgot, there has also been a rumour they were involved in the Baghdad By Pass. Very educational. Their Head office by the way is in Croydon, snuggled in next to SchNEWS's old friends Nestle. How sweet!

## Diary of Adrian Molesworth

February 6th is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the eviction of the "Rainbow Village" at Molesworth, Cambridgeshire. The site was a proposed second base for 64 American cruise missiles. Under the cover of darkness on 6th February 1985, a convoy containing 1,500 Royal engineers, 600 MoD police and 1,000 civil Police descended on the village to evict 150 peace campers. The eviction took 5 months to plan, and was the largest peacetime mobilisation of troops in this country. Those protesters that refused to move their homes had to stand by and watch as their caravans were bulldozed off site. At 10am when the eviction was nearly over, Tarzan (Michael Heseltine) himself appeared from his helicopter wearing an army combat jacket and was quoted as saying he was "Deeply concerned for the children of the village". In order to keep the protesters out a £3million security fence was constructed. Unfortunately, with the ending of the 'Cold War' only a few missiles ever reached the base before it was redundant. A permanent peace garden is being maintained at the base, for more details contact Cambridge CND 01480 475284

## POSITIVE AGREEMENT?

Don't believe everything you read - even in SchNEWS! It appears that we may have been too cynical in last week's issue, when we doubted whether the Montreal talks on genetic food would reach any positive outcome. However, it seems miracles do happen as 130 government delegations came to an agreement. hey presto. the Cartagena Protocol was born!

In plain English this means that big nasty genetic companies have to tell governments what they are up to when they try to introduce their suspect wares. Imports will also be subject to new guidelines, with warning labels being introduced for GM products. And finally, ministers got rid of a clause that would have given big businesses unrivalled power courtesy of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)!

Sounding too good to be true? Maybe SchNEWS may have been right to be a little scathing. On closer inspection, it appears that labels on GM food only have to say "may contain" GMOs, and in fact the US companies can still go the WTO, if they believe that 'free trade' rules are being broken. Confused? How do you think we feel writing this stuff.

## ANARCHY ON THE ALPS

The hills were alive with the sound of protest in the small ski resort of Davos, Switzerland last week, when the World Economic Forum held their annual conference. 1,000 chief executives of the world's largest companies and 30 heads of government gathered to pat themselves on the back about the joys of globalisation. Does this sound familiar? Yes, the WEF is not much different to the World Trade Organisation who we all know and love, and, like the Seattle Conference, the WEF met opposition. Swiss police, backed by Army units and reinforced by officers from Germany, responded to snowball throwing protestors by using metal grided land cruisers, guns and tear gas. Just a bit over the top? Of course not! We wouldn't want anything to happen to those 1,000 executives now, would we? Where would the world be without them?! \* "After five days in Davos he understands that the masters of the markets know as little about the likely movements of the global economy as the waiters supplying them with plum brandy and cheese fondue" Lewis Lapham, "The Agony of Mammon" (Verso, 98). Don't be put off by the title!

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## SchNEWS in brief

Sat 5th Feb the University of East London are running a 'Political Activism and Social Movements' Day School, a free one-day event aiming to bring activists and academics together. Including speakers from Exodus, Genetix Snowball, and Amnesty International, it takes place at University of East London, Docklands campus (nearest station Cyprus Station, Docklands light railway). Maps and further details etc at the UEL website [www.uel.ac.uk/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/) \*\* **May Day open meeting** Sat 5<sup>th</sup> February to discuss action possibilities for May Day. At University of London Union, Malet Street, 1-5pm \*\* And to raise funds for May Day, there's a benefit "evening of music and comedy with Atilla the Stockbroker, the Doleclaimer's Robb Johnson, and North London Anarcho Syndicalist Choir", Sat 19<sup>th</sup> February the Arsenal Tavern, Blackstock Road (Nearest tube Finsbury Park) 7.30 'till late £4/£2. \*\* **Refugees at One World Week:** Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> February Sir David Ramsbotham, Chief Inspector of Prisons will be speaking at the One World Week Fair, 2-4 pm Wadham College, Oxford. What a good opportunity for people to raise issues about the new practices at Campsfield... <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~asylum> \*\* **Another Chumbawumba Baby!** Belated congratulations Danbert on the arrival of twins, Carson and Stella. Shall we make births, deaths and marriages a regular feature? \*\* **Direct action by the deaf!** Members of Parents Against Childhood Experimentation were set to take direct action last night (thurs) at a talk at the Royal Society of Medicine about hearing implants for young children. "We do not want our children to be turned into Frankenstein monsters" said a spokesperson. \*\* In a rare burst of honesty **The World Bank** has admitted it's crap - its failure to implement policies is fucking up old forests and the poor. So you heard it from them first then, eh! \*\* SOAS students occupying their school's offices were evicted at 5.30 am Saturday morning, but over 250 students at UCL went into occupation on Wednesday to protest against tuition fees. Contact the Campaign For Free Education on PO Box 22615 London N1 1WT \*\* **Radio 4A** takes to the skies of Brighton again on Sunday 13th Feb, from noon till the next day on 106.6FM, with its usual mix of speech-based programming, this time sharing the airwaves with other top broadcasters.

## STOP THE SANCTIONS

Voices in the Wilderness, a campaign group for the people of Iraq, is planning a day of action at the UN on 14th Feb to highlight the ongoing humanitarian crisis. In case you'd forgotten, airstrikes by the US and UK are still wreaking havoc across Iraq, with one US jet managing to hit a primary school last November, injuring schoolchildren. Just to make you feel even better, this war is costing you, the taxpayer, an estimated £1m a week! Added to the constant bombardment are the economic sanctions imposed upon Iraq in 1990, which have led to around 227,000 deaths in young children owing to the imposed poverty and social ruin.

Voices in the wilderness is urging people to send postcards to Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, asking him to help lift the sanctions. This is planned alongside the day of action on 14 Feb. Voices in the Wilderness UK, 16b Cherwell Street, Oxford, OX4 1BG 01865 243232. And if you're in Brighton on 29th Feb, there's a talk on the Iraq sanctions at The Auditorium, Brighthelm Centre, North Road at 7.30pm.

## Inside SchNEWS

There were riots in Turin on Monday after Silvano Pellissero was given 6 years and 8 months in prison. His crime? According to the state prosecutor, Tatangelo, "Pellisero and those like him are dangerous for the democratic state, not so much for the nature of their crimes, but for the popular consensus which they create in a potentially explosive social situation."

3 people, Silvano, Soledad Maria Rosas and Edoardo Massari were the scapegoats of a continued crackdown by the Italian authorities on people labelled as 'terrorists'. Despite no evidence they were accused of being involved in the Grey Wolves, a so-called eco-terrorist group which allegedly 'sabotaged' a building site for high speed trains in the Northern Italian Alps.

The Italian state used special 'terrorism laws' to keep the three in prison despite lack of evidence against them. This led to first Edoardo, then Sole a month later to commit suicide (knowing the reputation of the Italian police in causing 'accidental deaths of anarchists' some people seriously question these suicides).

The terrorist laws were introduced in the 1970's, against a background of armed militant left wing activism. These laws are now being used, for example, against people for simply belonging to an activist group, and a special police force similar to the secret services, deal entirely with political activists. As one Italian activist explained to SchNEWS "If you are involved in direct action even to the most minimal extent you are followed and spied on night and day; but what is most detrimental of this 'terrorism legacy' is the public image given to us. What the media calls us, this is what people see us: people are now scared of those who fight on the same side, popular support is no longer part of us, such laws have thrown the entire population against us."

Show solidarity! Protest in front of the Italian Embassy, Wednesday 23rd February (Bond Street tube) email: [silosquat@tiscalinet.it](mailto:silosquat@tiscalinet.it)

**IN THE UK**, The Terrorism Bill (See SchNews 242), as predicted, is being rushed through the various Parliamentary stages at high speed. It is now likely to become law by April. But this isn't stopping groups around the country from making some noise. See website for events around the country: [www.blagged.freemove.co.uk/law.htm](http://www.blagged.freemove.co.uk/law.htm) or join the on-line discussion list: [tb-campaigns@listbot.com](mailto:tb-campaigns@listbot.com) or phone 01273 298192 for latest updates.

## ...and finally...

When yer public popularity drops, perhaps a name change is in order. Hence after a nuclear accident Windscale changed its name to Sellafield (must be up for another name change soon); The Special Patrol Group changed its name to Territorial Support Group (after the death of Blair Peach); British Aerospace changed its name to BAE Systems after it brought up the military wing of GEC Marconi. Compulsory Competitive Tendering, where Councils have to buy the cheapest most crappy services, is now Best Value in New Labour speak. Now the latest cosmetic change is everyone's favourite chemical company Monsanto, who are to be known as Pharmacia and Searle and Upjohn, strangely the despised gene bending soya splicing section is still being known as Monsanto. Monsanto have in the past also been known as Globalstrike, Flextrex, Pantalone, Solutia and Flexsys.

## disclaimer

SchNEWS apologises to all readers. This week's disclaimer got lost in the post. Honest