



DRRINGG DRRINGG! PRESS 3 FOR THIS WEEK'S

# SchNEWS

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## RINGPEACE

"You feel like you are on a galley boat – being watched, answering calls every 30 seconds, monitored and told off if there are mistakes"

Dougie Rafferty, (ex) Excell call centre worker

"I feel absolutely knackered like a total zombie, can't be bothered speaking to anyone, I go home and I just want to sleep"

Anonymous Excell call centre worker

**They've been described as the "modern day sweatshops" with "battery hen" working conditions. Yet one in fifty people now work in the them. Welcome to the world of the Call Centre.**

SchNEWS is used to hearing about dodgy companies but Arizona-based multinational Excell multimedia LLC really takes the biscuit. They run two call centres in Glasgow employing more than 600 operators who deal with things like directory enquiries and 999. Starting their jobs on a pocket bulging £9,000 a year, company documents show that the company aim for operators to be on the phone for 97% of the time. This means staff must answer the phone twice a minute for over seven hours a day, ask the manager for a drink of water, and make up lost time at the end of a shift if they spend too much time in the loo. And all the time closely monitored.

When Channel 4 spilled the beans on this bunch of dodgy bastards, they uncovered one story of a man who had an epileptic fit while at work and was taken to hospital after cutting his head. When his pay slip came through, the company had deducted three hours for the time he spent in the hospital! This then had a knock on affect on his attendance record, costing him more than two hundred quid in lost wages.

Of course the firm don't take criticism lying down and sacked Dougie Rafferty, and have threatened one woman member of staff with "facial mapping" to prove that she was not the anonymous employee who dared to criticise them on TV!

But surely with the new Trade Union laws Call Centres and the like aren't gonna get away with acting like latter day scrooges? Under the law if enough staff

get together and want to join a union then employees have an obligation to recognise them. There's just one small snag. As one former Excell manager pointed out, thanks to massive turnover in staff, it's unlikely that there'll ever be the numbers needed to come to any agreement. And while people try to organise or speak out against their work conditions, they'll just be shown the door. In other words, "don't call us we'll call you."

### Bunch of BT Balls...

British Telecom is the third largest company in the UK (after BP Amoco and Glaxo Wellcome) and the fifth largest telecommunication company in the world. Its last annual report in 1998 revealed £4.3 billion in profits, or £136 a second, and they have operations in over 230 countries from Indonesia to Eastern Europe.

Chief Executive Sir Peter Bonfield earns £2.53 million pounds a year, a pay rise of over £1 million. SchNEWS wonders how he manages.

In June 1999, 120 workers were sacked from their jobs at the Directory Inquiries call centre in Stirling due to "regrettable advancements in technology" (Daily Record 6/7/99). The following week Glasgow telemarketing phone operators had their commission rates slashed from £4.50 an hour to £2.50 to boost profits and attract more business investment.

BT recruits the majority of its staff from employment agencies like Manpower and Blue Arrow. With a flexible workforce, no contracts, sick pay or holiday pay, BT is a New Labour model of corporate modernity - putting profit before employment rights.

All BT telephone operators and Customer Service Advisors are monitored and timed for the amount of calls taken in a shift. If employees do not meet Call Handling Time targets of one call every 180 seconds, then they are disciplined, refused overtime, and in some cases sacked. Calls are routinely recorded and listened to from a remote call centre in Coventry, where if an employee is caught swearing or hanging up they are immediately sacked and escorted from the building.

\* Got a gripe against call centres – then why not share your story with SchNEWS?

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

**For smiling!** At the last Shamrock monkey farm demo a lost-it cop was pointing people out for the snatch squads. One bloke wound him up by standing around doing nothing more sinister and life-threatening than grinning. Not for long - "Grab him!"

At the same demo someone was jumped by the goons (not the funny ones) and thrown to the ground, resulting in a shattered hip. He's still waiting to see if he'll need a hip replacement.

### UP YER PRIVATES: PUSEY SAYS ME-OW

The company who took over when the passport agency was privatised have been told by MPs to stop pussy-footing around.

Siemens Business Services, the company at the heart of the passport fiasco which led to thousands of people having their holidays ruined last summer, have announced a 33% rise in the cost of a passport – due to their cock-ups. The rise includes the cost of handing out umbrellas and luncheon vouchers to people queuing in the pissing rain waiting for their passports.

The agency was privatised under the Private Finance Initiative, a dodgy scheme which has been grasped enthusiastically by Blair's grateful dead (see SchNEWS 219). Passport costs have now risen from £21 to £28. Thanks a poxy lot! The new director of this company, Gary Pusey, who sneaked in though the back cat flap and seems intent on milking us dry, has obviously pulled a few strokes in his time. He purred "the company had already had £1.4 billion worth of public sector contracts - two of which, the passport agency and immigration directorate, were in the dog house." OK! he didn't say dog house.

Poor old Sir David Omand, who only gets paid a measly £100,000 a year as permanent secretary at the Home Office, told MPs the rise will go towards recuperating some of the £12.6m lost in last summer's fiasco. However, Home Secretary Mr Jack "the pancake" Straw, not normally known for his involvement in catastrophes, insisted the increase was to fund the agency's £25m a year modernisation programme. Maybe he'd picked up his son's wacky backy that morning or was it Mo Mowlam's?

### Master Bates

While we're on the subject of privatised goon shows, (SchNEWS 246 Big Mac in Kids Takeaway) we should mention Rams Episcopal school in Hackney, London. 3% of schools are judged by inspectors to be failing pupils, so it's quite ironic that Rams Episcopal, the first school taken over by a private company, is to be closed and reopened under a new name due to it being judged as... failing. The teachers are now doing a thousand lines "we are not failing tossers".

## BEACH-BUMMER

“The affair raises issues of economic imperialism. Want to chop down a mountain in Yosemite? Not at any price. Want to destroy a beach in Maya Bay? That’ll be \$100,000 dollars plus deposit, whilst the leading man pockets \$20 million thank you very much”

Maya Bay International Alliance

Ever wondered what a tropical paradise looks like? Rupert Murdoch’s new 20th Century Fox film “The Beach”, directed by Andrew Macdonald and Danny Boyle, obviously didn’t. They were slightly confused as far as the word ‘paradise’ was concerned, and thought it meant bulldozing beaches, pulling up indigenous trees and single-handedly helping to destroy an ecosystem. This lot make the Benidorm lager louts look like Noddy in the land of Oz.

The usual fee for filming in a Thai National park is 1,000 baht, about \$26, but as Fox films handed over \$108,000 which they termed a donation and an additional deposit of 5 million baht, it was hardly a surprise they received the green light.

This holiday romance took place at Maya Bay, Ko Phi Phi Thailand. However, on visiting this area of National Park they discovered it was not their definition of utopia, so, against the wishes of local people the film makers chose to change the paradise into Hell by removing vital dune plants and introducing palm trees. MacDonald then had the audacity to state “everything is tip-top on Phi Phi Leh” even though the last monsoon washed his make shift beach away.

Local people are now asking people to boycott the film, and on Wednesday at the film premier in Leicester Square, activists from the Campaign for Ethical Filmmaking gatecrashed proceedings. Donning Leonardo DiCaprio masks, they were waved through police lines, under the cover of a stretched limo and alighted to the screams of thousands of waiting fans! Screams turned to laughter, though, as one penguin-suited activist held aloft a Golden Bull-dozer Award.

To add insult to injury, Leonardo DiCaprio is hosting the Earth day celebrations in April on, you’ve guessed it - sustainable living.

SchNEWS suggests that instead of watching the film you read the original book by Alex Garland. [www.uq.edu.au/~pggredde/](http://www.uq.edu.au/~pggredde/)

## ESSEX EVICTIONS

As SchNEWS went to press, the protest camp at Gorse Wood, was being evicted. In case you’ve forgotten, large areas of meadowland, woodland and the environmentally sensitive Curry Hill are set to be destroyed to make way for the A130 link road. This is no country lane we’re talking about here, the proposed road is to be a six lane motorway.

The road is being financed by the private finance initiative, and is sponsored by Countryroute plc which is a consortium of roadbuilders Laing and other contractors.

Help is urgently needed, so ring 02082 994241 or mobile 07957 915977 for more info, and get involved!

P.S - Can anyone tell us if this road is set to be part of the Trans-European Network?

\* The protest camp at Hockley is to be evicted any day now. Campaigners are trying to stop 66 luxury homes being built (SchNEWS 243). Security have now arrived and surrounded the site, and the waiting protestors could do with more help. Arriving activists are advised to ring the camp mobile before arriving. Contact 01702 206353 or site mobile 0831 717815 for more info. [www.angelfire.com/mt/GBH](http://www.angelfire.com/mt/GBH)

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## SchNEWS in brief

Stop Press!! The first action against the British **Terrorism Bill** is in solidarity with an Italian anarchist who got 6 years and 8 months, under special terrorism laws, for allegedly sabotaging a building site, despite no evidence (SchNEWS 246). Meet 12 noon, outside the Italian Embassy (Bond Street Tube), Sat 19<sup>th</sup> Feb (changed from the 23<sup>rd</sup>). [Asilosquat@tiscalinet.it](mailto:Asilosquat@tiscalinet.it) \*\* Meeting to discuss the **Terrorism Bill**, Thurs 17<sup>th</sup> Feb at 6.30pm at the Bridge Hotel, Newcastle Upon Tyne. Contact Box 1TA, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE99 1TA. \*\* Demo against the far-right Freedom Party outside the **Austrian Embassy** on Sat, 19th February. 6:30pm outside Austrian Embassy, Belgrave Square, London (Hyde Park Corner tube). \*\* **Protest Songs**, an open mike night of protest songs against the Terrorism Bill. Wednesday 16th Feb, The Gladstone, Brighton. Call Sarah 01273 231374 if you are interested in playing \*\* Has anyone out there got photos of **Travellers’ New Year’s Parties in Europe** for inclusion in our next annual? If so send ‘em to SchNEWS with yer name and address on the back if you want them returned, also write down where they were taken \*\* Anyone in Brighton who is **fluent in French and English** (!) and can spare some time to do some translating, give SchNEWS a call, we’d really appreciate your help \*\* \*\* The **Nestle 16** (SchNEWS 242) are up in court on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> at Halifax Magistrates Court, Harrison Road, Halifax at 9.30am. A demo and solidarity actions are planned. Tel: 01268 682820

If you want some **full frontal naked radio**, tune into 106.5 FM in Brighton this Sunday for Radio 4A

## Bus Outing

Passengers on the number 15 Stagecoach bus in London this week took a ride with a difference when the bus suddenly met a woman holding a banner, ordering the vehicle to ‘Stop in the name of Love!’. As the bus drew to a halt, members of the Lesbian Avengers group commenced their mission – hanging banners stating ‘Repeal Section 28’, distributing leaflets to the passengers and painting the bus bright pink!

Lesbian Avengers, 0181 374 9885

## U’wa Misses

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> the U’wa tribe in Colombia’s call for international support was answered by people around the world, as one of Occidental Petroleum (Oxy) biggest shareholder’s Fidelity Investments was targetted in 34 cities across the globe.

The U’wa tribe of Colombia have been fighting against Oxy extracting oil from their land for a few years. Even Shell pulled out of the project citing human rights concerns. In Colombia oil brings militarisation and environmental destruction. Since November 1999 over 250 people have been occupying a proposed oil drilling site (SchNEWS 244). On 19th January thousands of Columbian military invaded U’wa territory and evicted the tribe from the test site.

Meanwhile Fidelity have hardly done their PR any favours by announcing that they invests in “companies with the highest likelihood of stock-price appreciation.... Our portfolio managers are not trained to make investment decisions in order to fulfill social or political objectives.” Meanwhile Oxy are trying to silence critics by requesting a temporary restraining order against groups supporting the U’wa. [www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)

## Inside SchNEWS

City Police spotters nabbed **Kuldip Bajwa** while demonstrating outside the Labour party conference in Bournemouth due to his likeness to someone caught on video hitting a police riot shield with a placard pole at June 18. Judge Barthurst Norman said too much leniency had previously been shown to J18 reprobates and sentenced Kuldip to a full 21 months for violent disorder. Letters of support to: Kuldip Bajwa, DN 7230, HMP Jebb Ave., Brixton, London, SW2 5XF.

**Jeff Booker**, sentenced to 18 months for the J18 protests, has been moved. His new address is HMP Elmley, Church Road, Eastchurch, Sheerness, Kent ME12 4AX. Prison number DN7071.

**Saptal Ram** has now been in jail for fourteen years, for defending himself against a violent racist attack in a Birmingham restaurant. Whilst in prison, he has been subjected to strip-searches and beatings. On Monday 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, his family are due to meet with Paul Boateng, the Minister for prisons, to demand that Saptal be released immediately. There will be a vigil of support on the same day outside the Home Office, Queen Anne’s Gate, London SW1 beginning at 9.30am.

Free Saptal Ram, PO Box 23139, London SE1 1ZU. [www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/saptal.html](http://www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/saptal.html)

## ...and finally...

The World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) last utterance was its wish to be more open. And where could be more open than a diminutive Middle East enclave clinging on to the edge of that famous democratic state, Saudi Arabia, opposite Iran and run by a monarchy with a population of just 540,000. Qatar of course. Their embassy told a startled SchNEWS, “Qatar expressed a wish to hold a meeting; our chances are good.”

After full on riots greeted their last two Conferences in Geneva and Seattle, it seems that out of the 135 member countries of the WTO, nobody wanted to bite the (rubber) bullet and invite those global racketeers to their shores. So the WTO must have thought it was the multinationals’ answer to winning the lottery when Qatar, after fighting off stiff competition from absolutely no one, invited them to hold the next big trade talks in 2001 in the middle of an Arabian desert in the capital Doha. The only people who are “over the moon” about this gathering are the all dressed in black, scarf clad anarchists, who feel quite confident about blending in.

Still, readers, you’ve got a bit of time to think of a good excuse to get through customs - but you’ll need to find someone who lives there. If that’s too much, SchNEWS recommends that protestors and soundsystems can leg it over the hills of Afghanistan, sneak though Iran then swim across The Gulf, or maybe just cut across Saudia Arabia. Dress as an Arab-looking tourist and you’re laughing.

Next time you’re surfing the web, why not do your bit to uphold society and give the Seattle Police Department a hand in bringing to justice those naughty anarchists who brought terror to Seattle during the WTO protests. Yes, the Seattle Police Intelligence Division has a lovely website full of colourful pictures of protestors wreaking havoc, and is divided into categories such as ‘arson’, ‘property damage’ and ‘assaults’. If you fancy having a look, then check out this ridiculously long website [www.pan.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/spd/wto/spdwotosuspecthome.htm](http://www.pan.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/spd/wto/spdwotosuspecthome.htm)

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