



wake up! It's yer moderate VOICE OF ANARCHIC REASON

SchNEWS

Printed and Published in Brighton by Justice?



Friday 11th January 2002

www.schnews.org.uk

Issue 337 Free/Donation

FULL OF MELCHETT

“The majority of NGOs and activists do not understand how public relations firms are helping corporations manipulate them. This is a fundamental strategic mistake.” - Andy Rowell author of Green Backlash.

This week Peter Melchett the former head of Greenpeace UK made famous for helping to trash genetic crops in Norfolk has turned coats and become a consultant for Burson-Marsteller - the biggest public relations (PR) company in the world.

Ironically Burson-Marsteller (B-M) are the PR Company for the genetic engineering company Monsanto. They specialise in ‘greenwashing’ - making corporations look like they’re being nice to the environment when in fact they’re doing the complete opposite. B-M have done PR makeovers for such nice companies as Union Carbide after the Bhopal gas leak killed up to 15,000 people in India, and Exxon after the Exxon-Valdez oil tanker ran aground in Alaska causing the worst oil spill in history. They even defended the 1980’s military dictatorship in Argentina that saw 35,000 civilians ‘disappear’.

Melchett says he isn’t compromising his principles as he will choose which companies to work with (but with the likes of Monsanto, BP, Nestle, Shell, Unilever, Sainsbury’s and British Nuclear Fuels on their books that’s some choice!).

But talking to environmentalists is standard a tactic used by PR companies to green a company’s image. *Managing Activism*, published by the UK Institute of Public Relations, describes this process, in typical PR speak, as “two-way symmetrical communications” which “offer a way forward where the company does not have to give in to activists or persuade them to give in.” And the hiring of activists is described by PR Watch as “a crude but effective way to derail potentially meddling activists”. It seems that Melchett is being led up the genetically modified garden path.

CON MERCHANTS

“It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality.” - PR adviser Morris Wolfe.

The modern PR industry dates back to the 1930s when companies realised they could use World War I style propaganda to deal with social movements and unions. PR companies are not interested in facts only images. B-M advise clients to concentrate on ‘stories - not issues’ and ‘symbols - not logic’, because “...symbols are central to

politics because they connect to emotions, not logic”. And these ‘symbols’ end up being reported in the media as crap lifestyle stories with the real issues not discussed. This is especially unsurprising since B-M is in partnership with ITN (Independent Television News) running the Corporate Television Networks (CTN) - which use ITN staff and facilities to make promotional videos for business clients - CTN videos have ended up in ITN broadcasts.

When the likes of Melchett give endorsements it makes the stories and symbols gain credibility with a cynical public. When cash strapped environmental charities take a few quid from companies, they do little to further their causes, yet greatly benefit the image of the companies involved. The WorldWide Fund for Nature accepted \$1 million from oil firms Chevron and BP for a conservation project in Papua New Guinea (between them BP and Chevron make over \$20,000 million profit per year). In return, leaked documents from Chevron revealed, “WWF will act as a buffer for the joint venture against ... international environmental criticism”. In 2000 WWF held back publication of a damning report on tropical forest destruction, for fear of upsetting the companies it named.

It is not just charities and activists that are used by the PR companies. There are a whole load of front groups set up to present a different picture to what environmentalists are saying. In 1989 B-M set up the Global Climate Coalition to discredit warnings about climate change; people involved in the Coalition include most of the big oil companies, motor manufacturers and chemical companies.

PR companies also specialise in creating their own grass roots groups. In North America and Australia this has led to the rise of the Wise Use Movement. Using campaigning tactics similar to en-

REBEL ALLIANCE

Get together of Brighton’s direct action groups (7-8pm), followed by Life Before Profit - a rally to stop the corporate killers (8-9.30pm), then DJ’s (till 12.30 am). Monday 21st January at the Komedia, Gardner Street, Brighton.

vironmental groups they scare farmers, forestry workers, miners, etc. into thinking that the environmental movement is out to destroy jobs and ways of life. Thousands of timber jobs in North America have been lost to automation, economic rationalisation and export of raw logs, but environmental protection is used as an easy scapegoat. Behind these groups which present a front of concerned citizens and workers, are big businesses. For example People For the West! who claim a membership of 18,000 is funded by 200 companies and 12 of its 13 directors are mining company executives!

So how do PR companies deal with yer uncompromising activists? Well it is that age-old tactic, divide and rule - exploit differences in the movement by co-opting the more conservative elements and ridiculing the radicals. PR companies divide activists up into categories such as radicals, opportunists, idealists and realists. ‘Idealists’ are educated and altruistic and should be changed into ‘realists’ who are willing to work within the system for change and ‘opportunists’ are simply careerists who want jobs and power. So Melchett seems to have migrated from an idealist to an opportunist. The most problematic group are the ‘radicals’ who want to change the system or have underlying political motives, the tactic of the PR gurus is to isolate the radicals from the support of the realists and idealists. Labels like extremists and terrorists are attached to anyone who refuses to compromise or takes effective action. But since PR companies are not interested in issues, only stories then this sort of doublespeak is unsurprising.

SchNEWS thinks maybe a leaf should be taken out of the PR experts’ book and we should start describing radical capitalists as uncompromising extremists using terror tactics to destroy the environment and wreck people’s lives in the pursuit of profit.

* Further Info: PR Watch produces a regular bulletins: www.prwatch.org, read “Global Spin” by Sharon Beder (Green Books) or “Green Backlash” by Andy Rowell (Routledge).

WORLD POWER PROPAGANDA

Burson-Marsteller is the biggest PR company in the world, with offices in 32 countries and 1,700 employees.

B-M is owned by the WPP group, who own 17 other PR companies.

Believe it or not but WPP began life as Wire & Plastic Products a small British company making shopping baskets! In 1985 it was bought up by Martin Sorrell, financial director of Saatchi & Saatchi, he then acquired lots of marketing and PR companies and is now the world’s largest communications group with a massive ability to influence the way people think.

POSITIVE SchNEWS

We know that reading SchNEWS can sometimes be a bit of a wrist slashing experience, so we thought we'd dedicate a page of the first issue of 2002 to positive news stories. - Stories of people getting together in their communities to come up with grassroots solutions to some of the world's problems...enjoy it while you can because it'll be back to the depressing stuff next week.

TRANSPORT

Critical Mass – is held in cities all over the world where people sick of the dominance of cars take to the bike as a sustainable solution, ride en-masse through the streets. These events are often regular, check the SchNEWS party and protest section on our website to find out ones in your area. Other means of bringing bikes into cities have included cyclists painting their own bike lanes on roads, and the now famous Reclaim the Streets events held across the world. * York has a critical mass bike ride on Sat. 2nd Feb, starting at Clifford's Tower at noon. "It will also be emphasising climate chaos, so people are encouraged to dress up in snorkels, wet suits, rubber rings, armbands etc. We would also like people on foot as well on bikes to talk to and hand out stuff to motorists and passers-by." socs203@york.ac.uk

* If yer fed up of cycling on dangerous main roads why not design your own back-street routes. Maps designed for cyclists for both urban and rural routes are available. Visit www.sustrans.org.uk

* Vivaldi – a four year sustainable transport plan is being introduced for Bristol. This includes 'home-zones' – taking traffic out of residential zones, revamped cycle lanes, schemes to power buses with alternative fuels, a new tram system, a 'clear zone' in the city centre, park and ride schemes and more to rescue Bristol from its traffic problems. www.sustrans.org.uk

HOUSING

For many people finding secure, affordable housing is one of their main worries. At this time of year when people are sleeping rough in freezing temperatures it is shocking to find out that there are seven empty homes for every homeless household in England. In the Burnley Wood area of Burnley, Lancashire, 1 in 10 houses are empty. The local Council's solution to the problem has been to let the properties rot and then bulldoze them. A number of local residents though were fed up and managed to secure a grant to set up a new social housing company. The company makes no profit and uses an idea called "Homesteading". The company buys empty properties, improves them if necessary, then charges a low rent, some of which is kept back in a special fund for a mortgage deposit for the residents if they choose to buy their own house later. Any profit made by the company goes into a special recycling fund to buy other properties. A similar scheme is now also reviving empty properties in areas of Sheffield. More info Empty Homes Agency www.emptyhomes.com 020-78286288

Another way to solve your housing problems is to get involved in a co-op. Housing co-ops are essentially housing associations run by the members (who are also the tenants), so as well as getting secure and often cheap housing you are also your own landlord. There are loads of existing co-ops around the coun-

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try who are often looking for new members, alternatively why not set up your own? To find out more contact Radical Routes, 16 Sholebroke Av, Leeds LS7 2HB 0113 262 9365 www.radicalroutes.org.uk

RECYCLED HOUSING

Alternatively why not put your waste to good use and collect it all to build your own house. The Bishops Wood environment centre in Worcester is built from recycled waste such as old telephone directories and used car tyres, but even better they've got guinea pigs grazing on their turf roof. Take a virtual tour of the centre at www.4seasons.org.uk/centres

* There's a Green Architecture Day on Saturday 26th January at the Phoenix Centre, Brighton The day includes talks on sustainable buildings, including the Brighton Earthship. For more info phone 01273-503613 or see www.brightonpermaculture.co.uk

FARMING

There are loads of schemes popping up around the country aimed at cutting out the supermarkets and making it easier for people to buy direct from local farmers. One such scheme is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) which is not only great for customers but also helps farmers so they don't have to sell their souls to supermarkets. The Soil Association defines CSA as "a partnership between farmers and consumers where the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared." Fundamental to CSA is the mutual support between the farmer and the consumer with some degree of commitment. For example a vegetable grower may draw up a budget reflecting the production costs for the year and community members sign up and purchase their shares either in a lump sum or instalments. In return for their investment members receive a box of fresh, locally grown food once a week. As the Soil Association points out "CSA gives farmers and growers the fairest return on their products. They receive a guaranteed market for their produce – and can invest their time on the growing rather than looking for customers. As with all types of local food initiatives – box schemes, farmers' markets, food co-ops etc the local economy is stimulated by consumers supporting local business, the grower is also part of a community and is no longer isolated. Community members benefit enormously by receiving fresh, locally grown produce on a regular basis. Education about where food comes from and how it is produced is also a strong feature of these schemes. Most CSA schemes welcome members to come along to open days and even help with the harvest. As CSA farms are directly accountable to their consumer members, they strive to provide fresh, high-quality food, typically using organic and bio-dynamic methods."

There are currently about 100 CSA's in the UK and the Soil Association are currently working on ways to expand the idea. Lets all join up and watch the supermarkets crumble.

Soil Association 0117 929 0661 www.soilassociation.org/

ENERGY

Residents of Ollerton a former coal mining village in the East Midlands are shedding the area's destructive past and are building a new sustainable village on the former colliery site. After the closure of the colliery and the collapse of the coal industry in the 1990's the villagers were left with nowhere else to go. Looking to the future the community got together and formed the Sherwood Energy Vil-

lage. The new village will be at the cutting edge of sustainability with a bio-mass power generator, educational facilities, energy efficient housing, cycle trails, sustainable construction design and materials, clean industrial developments and water recycling instead of the traditional polluting drainage systems. Conference and education centres on the site will also provide local employment. Info: www.sherwoodenergyvillage.co.uk

To find out about other energy saving and sustainable developments contact Centre for Alternative Technology 01654 705950 www.cat.org.uk

SEEDY SATURDAY

Brighton gardeners should get along to St George's Hall, St George's Road, Kemptown for a community seed swap. There will be speakers and films on biodiversity, the importance of seed saving, bio-piracy, genetics and related gardening topics, displays and stalls by community allotment groups and organic seed companies – as well as the seed swap itself.

With five corporations fighting for control of the world's food production, millions of acres of farmland being planted with genetically modified crops and 97% of our vegetable varieties lost in UK in the last 100 years Seedy Saturday is a response to these problems. Seed saving is a way all of us can do our bit to protect bio-diversity keeping rare and outlawed varieties safeguarded for future generations. It is taking place on February 9th 11am till 4pm and entrance is just £1. 01273 882552 or email baggage@primalseeds.org

SchNEWS in brief

6th Pedal Power Convention is at RISC, 35-39 London St., Reading. Sun 10th Feb, noon -6pm 013444-482266 www.c-realevents.demon.co.uk
** Fieldgate, also known as the London Action Resource Centre is set to open shortly in Whitechapel, and will be a resource for people interested in the growing movement for a co-operative, non-hierarchical and ecological society. The overall idea is to have a permanent building with meeting room/exhibition space, office, library, roof garden and prop and banner-making basement. One of those involved told SchNEWS "This is an exciting development on the London and UK direct action scene. It's also one of many similar projects coming together both in and outside the capital, other examples being the Sumac Centre in Nottingham, Bridge 5 in Manchester and Emmaz in London." Help needed with building and admin work, contact 020-7281-4621 or fieldgate@gn.apc.org
** Bypass corporate media – tune into pirate Radio. This weekend Radio 4A is back 106.6 FM www.radio4a.org.uk

...and finally...

Want to be an activist from beyond the grave? Want to avoid your death being part of the ruthless funeral industry? Have a DIY funeral personalising your special day, use a low-impact cardboard or home-made coffin, or get buried in a woodland and plant a tree instead of using a gravestone. Having bodies buried on land provides a legal battle for a would-be developer - taking tunnelling tactics to new extremes! To find out where the woodland burial sites are in UK, and advice about alternative funerals, contact the Natural Death Centre. 020-8452-6434 www.naturaldeath.org.uk

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers we're up to our necks in Melchett every day. Honest!