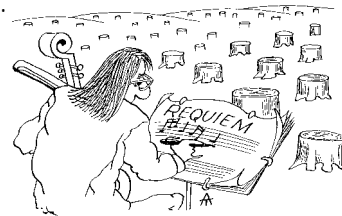




wake up! wake up! I t's yer heavily subsidised...

# SchNEWS

Printed and Published in Brighton by Justice?



Friday 1st February 2002

[www.schnews.org.uk](http://www.schnews.org.uk)

Issue 340 Free/Donation

## FOOD FIGHT

**"Everywhere on these Isles, rich and beautiful habitats have been ploughed, bulldozed and sprayed out of existence, not as a result of need but in response to farm subsidies" – Graham Harvey, The Killing of the Countryside**

This week the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming published its long awaited report on what they see as the future of agriculture in the UK. Commissioned by the government in the wake of the foot and mouth crisis, it recommends changes in the way we produce our food, namely that more money be spent on organic farming methods and subsidies towards the protection of the environment rather than for food production.

Foot and mouth was just the latest in a long line of disasters to illustrate the unhealthy state of UK farming. Since the introduction of subsidies in the last few decades, farming has largely become an industrialised process just like any other manufacturing industry. Many parts of Britain could be described as agricultural wastelands, devoid of wildlife and plants. Look out across the countryside in some parts of the UK and you will see endless fields of chemically contaminated monocrop, separated not by hedgerows but by roads and barbed wire. Over 10,000 miles of hedgerows disappear each year. 97% of meadowland has been lost since WW2, and many water courses have been heavily polluted through extensive chemical use. Prof. Jules Pretty of the University of Essex has calculated that even before foot and mouth, the hidden costs of industrial agriculture to our health and environment added up to £2.3 billion a year.

It's estimated that in the last 2 years at least 40,000 people have lost their jobs in agriculture. Many people have come to accept the failures of the modern farming system as the price we have to pay for cheap food. But with the taxpayer contributing to the £3 billion in subsidies paid to farmers each year, each family is actually paying an extra £10 a week.

### Supermarket Sweepstakes

On the face of it we'd have to agree with Tony Blair for once, who welcomed the new report saying that "the current situation benefits no-one: farmers, taxpayers, consumers or the environment". But er, sorry Tony but we think Tesco might disagree with you there. Supermarkets are raking it in, with Tesco's profits rising every year in the last decade, last year amassing over £1 bn. The supermarkets' power on our

food chain has become almost complete, and the result has been that our agricultural land now looks like the supermarkets they are servicing.

A fifth of farms, mostly the wealthy ones in this country received 80 percent of the annual production subsidies. This mis-distribution of subsidies has been compared to the government choosing to subsidise grocery shops, and giving all the money to Tesco's and Sainsbury's. And farming just like the retail world has had its casualties - small farms are closing all the time while the large monoculture farms (yer Tesco equivalent) keep growing. But even these big farms are being screwed by the supermarkets they serve. For example a litre of milk in March last year costs 22p to produce, farmers were being paid 17.6p for each litre, the supermarket was selling it for 35p, that's 17.4p profit for supermarkets and a bill of 4.4p to tax payer for subsidies, which means that we are subsidising the supermarkets! Overall today in the UK only 9p of each pound you spend ends up in the farmer's pocket.

### Food Chained

Marion Shoard the author of "This Land is Our Land" told SchNEWS that this idea of environmental subsidies assumes that farmers know what's best, yet considering that they're the ones who've been busy destroying the landscape in the first place, putting our faith in them helping to restore it is a bit laughable. Marion believes that the best way to shake up our agricultural system is to get rid of subsidies altogether. She believes that land prices would then plummet and farming would become more profitable, this would then allow land to be bought by environmental and social groups for the public good.

This sounded like a good idea so we tried to track down some farmers who've man-

\* Only 8% of UK farmland is given over to crops that provide for people directly. The rest goes to feed livestock.

\* We would need only a fifth of our current cultivated area to be self sufficient in this country if we grew food for only human consumption.

\* In 1970 the average household spent 25% of its income on food, the equivalent figure today is little more than 10%.

\* In 1950 there were 221,662 food shops in Britain, by 1997 this had gone down to just 36,931.

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

**For Canoeing without lights!!**

Last Friday, Faslane peace protestor Jenny Gaiawyn was arrested and charged with 'breach of the peace' for canoeing without any lights around the Gareloch where those nice Trident submarines live. For that crime she spent 3 days in police custody and is due in court on the April 2<sup>nd</sup> (should be April 1<sup>st</sup>)

aged to survive without subsidies, but unfortunately we couldn't find any. Not surprising really when the price farmers get for their produce is often less than it costs them to produce it in the first place. But regardless of whether or not redirecting subsidies are the solution to our problems, nothing is likely to change until there is a serious shift in the balance of power in the food chain. The biggest villains of all are the supermarkets who've made us believe they're providing us with cheap food. The report does nothing to challenge the powers of supermarkets, which isn't surprising when you consider that Peter Davis from Sainsbury's was a member of the Committee. Professor Pretty points out "The quest for even cheaper food is at the root of all these problems. It has encouraged farmers to cut corners, compromising food safety, animal welfare and damaging the environment."

\* Further reading "The Killing of the Countryside" by Graham Harvey. For a history of the landownership in Britain read "This Land is Our Land- The struggle for Britain's Country" By Marion Shoard. Loads of information on supermarkets at [www.corporatewatch.org.uk](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk)

### Positive SchNEWS

It isn't necessarily true that farming and environmental destruction need to go hand in hand. Ragman's Lane Farm in Gloucestershire is one of many commercial farms now being run successfully using permaculture ecological principles. When Matt Dunwell and Jan Davies took over the farm in Gloucestershire, in 1990 the Valuer commented that its 50 acres of grassland could only provide half of one salary, which would be true were it only a conventional farm. But now the farm employs three full-time people. The farm sells most of its food locally and they run regular courses to pass on their knowledge - the next one is 23-24 February is 'Growing and selling vegetables'. More info Mandy Pullen Ragman's Lane Farm, Lower Lydbrook, Glos, GL17 9PA. 01594 861173 [www.permaculture.co.uk](http://www.permaculture.co.uk)

\* And don't forget Seedy Saturday next Saturday 9th February at St. Georges Hall, St. Georges Rd, Brighton 11am - 4pm. Find out how to bypass the corporate seed industry and pick up some outlawed vegetable seeds. Volunteers needed to help out call 01273 882552 email [baggage@primalseeds.org](mailto:baggage@primalseeds.org)

## Andersen Fairy Tale

Would you get McDonalds to advise you about healthy eating? Or BP to sing the praises of free electricity from the sun? Well, Neo-Labour thought it would be a good idea to ask accountancy firm Andersen to write a report on the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) – the scheme where the nation's public services are flogged off to the private sector, who then lease them back to the taxpayer! Andersen said PFI was a great idea and would save money – but forgot to mention that it would also make them lots. They've already made millions thanks to 37 PFI schemes they've already got their sticky little accountants' fingers in. This company is so dodgy that even the Tories took them to court and banned them from any government contracts for 12 years. This didn't put off Neo-Labour though. Before Blair's government came to power, they were advised by Andersen about the windfall tax, capital gains tax and advanced corporation tax and in the summer of 1996 more than 90 Labour MPs attended an Andersen seminar on 'how to be a minister'. Patricia Hewitt, now Trade and Industry secretary, used to be head of research at Andersen Consulting.

Since coming to power, Neo-Labour continued to follow Andersen advice on how to flog off our remaining national assets like Air Traffic Control, the London Underground, defence research labs, schools and hospitals. Andersen has also given expert advice on Railtrack, the Jubilee Line Extension, British Nuclear Fuels, education action zones, the management of local education authorities as well as doing the accounts for the Millennium Dome....

Andersen are making the news at the moment for helping to cover up the collapse of energy giant Enron – which last year entered the record books by becoming the biggest company to go bankrupt in US corporate history. Not only did Andersen receive \$25 million for its Enron audit work, where you would have expected to see that Enron's accounting was bullshit, but also \$27 million for its Enron consultancy work, which probably explains why they turned a blind eye and also why one US Senator commented "If Enron robbed the bank, Arthur Andersen drove the getaway car."

Lately Andersen have been busy shredding as many Enron documents as possible – all in the interests of recycling and making more bedding for hamsters of course.

## All Along the Watchtower

Last week the Glastonbury Festival got its music license – after announcing that there would now be a zero tolerance policy against gatecrashers. In an open letter, organiser Michael Eavis wrote "Most of you probably know that for years a lot of people have been getting in...without tickets. Over or under the fence, forgery, scams - whatever. This year things have to change for good, otherwise the Festival will be gone, forever." To stop the gatecrashers there will be a new 3.6 metres high floodlit fence, "that can't be taken apart, climbed over or tunneled under", with watchtowers and CCTV.

Glastonbury has become a victim of its own success. Thanks to the free festival clampdown, financially crippling restrictions and police protection rackets on anyone who wants to put on a festival, focus has turned to one of the few that has survived. As Andy from Festival Eye magazine told SchNEWS "It's about time the Stonehenge Free Festival was brought back."

\* Keep up to date with festivals, parties and protests on the schnews website.

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## Super-CALI-fragilistic-expealidocious!

On Tuesday, workers from the Colombian City of Cali, who have been occupying the communications tower of Emcali since Christmas Day won an historic victory (See last weeks SchNEWS). An agreement was signed by the Colombian government, the Mayor of Cali, and the union guaranteeing that the company will not be privatised, that there will be no price increases this year, and that a high level anti-corruption inquiry will investigate and bring to justice all of those people who have siphoned off public resources from the company in recent years. If you want to hear more, Mario Novelli whose been sending daily reports from the occupation, will be speaking this Saturday(2) at the CORAS Centre, 161 Lambeth Walk, SE11.(nearest tubes Vauxhall) 4pm. Tel 07950-923448

## SchNEWS in brief

A detention centre for Migrants 'Sans Papiers' was occupied and wrecked last Saturday in Bologna, Italy. \*\* **Defend Council Housing** national conference next Saturday (9) in Birmingham. www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk, 020-7987-9989 \*\* **Mr Gluck's Radical Dairy** - a squatted social centre/info shop/café has opened at 47 Kynaston Road, Stoke Newington, London. 020-7249-6996 \*\* **A day of film, workshops and musicology** 2 Feb from 11am, with an evening party at the newly opened 217 Resource Centre on Swansea High Street. www.geocities.com/swan\_net/ \*\* Jeff Halper, of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and Salim Shawamreh, twice the victim of house demolitions, will speak on the subject: **Palestine and Israel: A Just and Viable Peace?** 12<sup>th</sup> Feb, 7.30 p.m Brighthelm Centre, Brighton \*\* **'Stop the War on Dis-sent:** - the threat to civil liberties posed by the Terrorism Acts'. 7pm, 12<sup>th</sup> Feb, Grand Committee Room, House of Commons, Westminster (er, that is the place where the terrorism acts were passed). 020-7586-5892, knklondon@gn.apc.org \*\* **Worthing Eco-Action** meeting next Tuesday (5) about the planned direct action campaign to stop the destruction of the countryside around Titnore Lane in Durrington. 7.45pm, upstairs at the Downview pub, West Worthing Station \*\* Two new indymedia sites to check out - **Indymedia Ireland** www.indymedia.ie/ and **Bristol Indymedia** www.bristol/indymedia.org \*\* **'Last Orders for the Local'** is an ace little pamphlet looking at how your local boozer is being corporate themed out of existence. Send some stamps and an SAE to ACATAC c/o BM Combustion, London, WC1N 3XX \*\* Campaign meeting on **'Planning a green paper'** 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 10am-5pm International student house, 229 Great Portland St. London 0161 9590999 planning@onlincam.freemove.co.uk \*\* **Jill Phipps Memorial Day**, An animal rights activist who was killed on a demo against live animal exports. 2nd Feb 12 noon Darley Oaks Farm.

## BCUK YOU

The Burma Campaign UK (BCUK) have managed to get lingerie giant Triumph International to close down its Burma-based manufacturing site. The company was targeted for its part in supporting the military regime. It was charged by the UN's International Labour Organisation with a 'crime against humanity' for the oppression and exploitation of Burma's people. A spokesperson from BCUK said, "This should serve as a warning to other companies operating in Burma - get out now or you could be next." Burma Campaign UK, 020-7281-7377, www.burmacampaign.org.uk

## ROAD TO RUIN

"This road will also increase regional air pollution, increase congestion, increase air & noise pollution for people using the bridle paths, underpass and the children at the school, increase traffic into Derby, increase pollution in an Air Quality Management Area, destroy wildlife habitats, make all alternative journey modes longer, and all for 20 seconds off journey into city " Dorothy, a Derby resident

The protest camp at the site of the proposed Alvaston bypass is calling for more people to join the protest camp there. The site has a kitchen and tree houses, but bring your own accomodation tent space may be limited! www.alvaston-bypass.i8.com

## Inside SchNEWS

Colin Davies is still on remand for opening an Amsterdam style coffee shop in Stockport last September. His friends and family have kept the café open since then so drop in for a (BYO) spliff. Colin's next court hearing is on Valentine's Day. 0161-4805902 www.dutchexperience.org

International Day of Solidarity for **Leonard Peltier**, Saturday 9th February. Next Wednesday will mark the 27th year since the American Indian Movement activist was framed and arrested for killing two FBI agents at the Pine Ridge Reservation. www.freepeltier.org.

## DOLE FACED

This week saw a two-day nationwide strike by benefit agency staff. SchNEWS spoke briefly to one of the strikers to find out what's been going on "The government want to merge the benefits and employment service into one agency Job Centre Plus which isn't a bad idea, but they want it all done in open plan offices. What we are asking for is that in every office when we think things might get violent that there is an area where staff can be behind screens. No one thinks its bad when post office or bank staff work behind screens, its basic health and safety."

"The first pilot open plan office opened in Harlesden two weeks ago, and already someone smashed the place up with a bike chain. In Lewes someone set fire to the benefit agency and one worker was followed out of Balham dole office and was kicked to a pulp at the tube station. Before the strike we were bombarded with government propaganda films – one was about benefit changes in Australia and how since they've gone open plan its safer. We found out that violent assaults have actually gone up and two members of staff have been killed. More strikes are planned with the threat of overtime ban and work to rule, but the Government are telling managers not to negotiate with the union. It seems they want to undermine us and push through more privatisation."

## ...and finally...

Ever thought of becoming an anarchist? **Pay: Crap; Chance of Arrest: High; Bosses: None; Fun: Loads.** By the time you read this you'll have missed Brighton's first anarchist job fair. St James Street job centre 'kindly' allowed a dozen dirty anarchists and a dog, to run an info stall on the premises for over an hour! Those pesky kids thought they might as well give an alternative option to the MOD who had an open day there. The police, always keen to promote the anarchist cause, suggested that the stall be moved outside (so as to reach a wider audience, of course). Don't worry though you needn't wait till the next open day. Start today! Jack in yer job, have a lie in, cause trouble and then save the world.

**disclaimer** You'd have to be a mad cow to think that SchNEWS gets a government subsidy (don't mention the dole cheques). Honest.