



BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

"The money he was getting was danger money. As far as I am concerned my son was murdered." - Mrs Mungovan.

Michael Mungovan had only been working on the railways for three days when he was sent to work unsupervised near Vauxhall station in south London. He was securing a section of track when he stepped into the path of a train travelling at 50 mph. The 22 year old student died instantly.

During a two week inquest that ended on Monday, the jury was told that Mr Mungovan did not have a valid track safety card, his colleague on the day of the accident did not have the relevant supervision skills and the experienced worker who Michael had been assigned to work with was suspended at the time. The jury at the inquest decided that Michael was "unlawfully killed" and the police will now be reopening a criminal investigation.

The death of Michael mirrors that of Simon Jones, who was sent to work as a docker with no training and killed within two hours. Michael had been in a classroom for only one and a half days' training and given just half a day on a rural single line before being sent to work on one of the busiest junctions in the country. His death once again highlights the hazards of untrained casual workers being given dangerous jobs with little training. Jobs that not so long ago would have been done by a highly skilled railway union workforce.

In a submission to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee last year, the RMT rail union said that the number of permanent staff employed on the tracks had fallen from 31,000 before privatisation to between 15,000 and 19,000. The union's former general secretary, Jimmy Knapp, told MPs that many of them were being replaced by casual workers recruited in pubs and clubs. "There are now 100,000 individuals that have got personal track safety certificates. Who these people are I would not know, and who looks after them and sees that they are doing the right things I would not know, but that is a staggering figure."

Michael was employed by temp agency McGinley Recruitment Services, who in turn were being used as subcontractors by Balfour Beatty Rail Maintenance Ltd, who were in turn paid to maintain the line for Railtrack - an illustration of the long chain of command now operating on the railways. As for the devastated family, they said in a statement that privatisation of the railways had led to a "low regard for human life".

MAKING A KILLING

The Transport Select Committee attacked Railtrack's recruitment practices because it doesn't actually employ the gangs of engineers who keep the railways running, nor does it train them. No, that's left to companies like Balfour Beatty and Jarvis who at the weekend blamed saboteurs for the recent Potters Bar rail crash where seven people died.

Just six days before Potters Bar, Jarvis were successfully prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for "unsafe practice during railway maintenance work." They were fined £7,000 for nearly running over several track workers, with the HSE railway inspector commenting, "The company's failure... led to people who were not competent being expected to do jobs they were not able to properly discharge." Not that this is the first time Jarvis has been in the dock.

In July 1999 they were fined £7,000 after a worker lost an eye because they had failed to carry out a proper risk assessment and had too few staff working on the track. A year later they were fined £500,000 after two separate train derailments because it "failed to check the track before trains were allowed to run, exposing employees and passengers to risk of injury." In October 2000, 41 year old Mark Meadowcroft was killed by a train while working for Jarvis. Still, forgetting about all that, Railtrack's replacement, Network Rail, has appointed Jarvis as a "technical adviser" on safety issues!

As for Balfour Beatty, not only have they been found guilty by the HSE on numerous occasions for causing the death and serious injury of its workers, but they are also the proud winners of a record £1.2 million fine after part of the tunnel they were building on the rail link to Heathrow airport 'collapsed'. And we're sure readers will be pleased to know that both Jarvis and Balfour Beatty are part of the consortiums wanting to take over the London Underground.

So what will happen now? Yesterday the Crown Prosecution Service announced a new investigation into the Paddington rail

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For having the wrong views...

New York animal rights activist Andrew Stepanian was recently sentenced to 6 months in prison after he asked one too many questions on a routine traffic stop. Watching a friend being beaten and arrested, he dared to speak up, an act which, unsurprisingly, ended with his arrest and beating. For his trouble, Andy received prison time for resisting arrest and obstructing government authority, "obstructing" being defined as getting in the way of a police officer's fist, apparently. This type of harassment is not new to Andy, a dedicated and well-known local activist in the fight against Huntington Life Sciences. Andy has lived with a video surveillance camera pointed at his driveway since January 2000 and was told by a judge during his sentencing that he participates in "a level of activism not welcome in our society."! Maybe that explains why another six months has been tacked onto his sentence for speaking at a demo back in March. Write to Andy at: Andrew Stepanian, NCC 0200 1777, c/o Nassau County Corrections, 100 Carman Avenue, East Meadow, NY 11554-1160, USA.

crash with a view to bringing corporate manslaughter charges. And hours before Monday's verdict, Transport Secretary Stephen Byers promised to examine the role of contractors and sub-contractors who work on railway maintenance. "A new relationship is needed...one based on best value, not lowest cost, providing a quality maintenance and renewal programme for railway track that puts the interests of the travelling public first." Nice words - but surely private companies are always going to be in it for the money and cut costs to make a few extra bucks. As Colin Chalmers from the Simon Jones campaign told SchNEWS "Profits are all these companies and their directors think about. If getting untrained students to do dangerous jobs makes more money than employing skilled workers, they'll do it. Casualisation kills - but it's good for dodgy companies' profits. These companies will only stop when we kick up enough fuss and make sure that directors start going to jail."

* 'Not this time - the Story of the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign (2002 update)' is out now. They are hoping to organise showings of this 25-minute film, with speakers, across the country in July. If you're interested in arranging a showing, email: action@simonjones.org.uk. For copies of the film send a cheque for £5 to Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, PO Box 2600, Brighton BN2 0EF. www.simonjones.org.uk

SAVE TITNORE WOODS

Protest against threat to destroy ancient woodland this Sunday (26) 2pm Titnore Lane entrance to Northbrook College, Durrington, Worthing (just north of Goring-by-Sea railway station). Bring banners, music and food. Train from Brighton Station at 12.20pm. www.worthinga27.freereserve.co.uk

Lethal Lessons

Welsh schools in Newport and Llandudno are being sold off for a profit and the schools are then being rebuilt on toxic landfill sites.

Ysgol John Bright School in Llandudno is being rebuilt on a former gasworks, which, among other things, is contaminated with arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury and asbestos. And then there's the gas itself—apparently there are “explosive levels” of methane still on the site, which have not yet been removed. And just to brighten things up a bit, the site is also on a floodplain, which adds to the danger of chemicals escaping. And what, you may ask, will become of the original school buildings? Why they'll be replaced by a shiny new Asda superstore, of course.

Durham Rd School and Nursery in Newport will be rebuilt on the site of an old municipal dump once used by GM giant Monsanto. It's a load of rubbish, but not just any old rubbish - this is rubbish with added ingredient “X” - a mystery gift from Monsanto. Nobody seems to know exactly what was dumped there, and there is no official record of it, but when soil samples were taken there were “some small explosions”. Locals have been assured everything will be peachy once a “protective membrane” is put over the site, sealing in the toxins, but as John Martin of Glebelands Action Group says, these membranes are notoriously ineffective. “This is just window dressing,” says Martin. “I don't think they can make it safe.” An alternative, relatively uncontaminated site had been proposed for the new school, but after soil testing, Newport council decided to sell the clean site to housing developers and put the school and accompanying nursery on the toxic waste dump.

Both Newport and Llandudno councils have avoided debate, fudged information and ignored local opinion. In the words of the Corporatewatch website, they are “As transparent as mud and as accountable as God.”

So why have schools been shoved onto land considered unfit for housing? Who gains from this cavalier treatment of children's futures? Local campaigner Lesley McCarthy has claimed there are “Three levels of Exploitation” - first, the companies that made the mess (Monsanto), second, the companies profiting from building the new schools (McAlpine), and third, the companies that buy up the old school sites (Newport housing developers and Asda) for more information, go to: www.corporatewatch.org/news/private_sector_may_15.htm

Going Bananas

More than a thousand Ecuadorian banana workers have been on strike at the plantation complex Los Alamos since May 6. On May 16, armed men broke through the picket line of non-violent, unarmed workers, taking 25 hostage. The hostages were eventually freed by their colleagues, though two workers were wounded by shotgun fire. The gun-toting thugs were apparently employed by presidential candidate Alvaro Noboa, whose company exports Bonita brand bananas and is violently opposed to the fledgling union organizing. FENACLE, the national union federation seeking to organise the workers, is saying that solidarity action from trade union and human rights organisations is urgently needed.

Positive SchNEWS

Sustainability Works is a new website for anybody interested in sustainable housing. It's packed full of references and ideas on what sustainable housing is all about, and provides support for organisations wanting to develop their own sustainable housing policy. www.sustainabilityworks.org.uk

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SchNEWS in brief

The **Harvest Forestry** squat opposing the Sainsbury's development in Brighton are still waiting for the baliffs to show-up. Support needed call 01273-680499 ** Next Monday (27th) the **Bhopal Medical Appeal** hold a talk on how to make corporations liable for the environmental and social disasters they cause. In particular Dow Chemicals, the company that caused the chemical disaster at Bhopal. Function room, Queens Head (near Brighton station). 07762265427 ** **Hereford now has its very own anarchist group** - herefordanarchists@hotmail.com ** Training weekend for people going on **International Solidarity Movement Direct Action** programmes in Palestine 1-2 June in Manchester, uksolidarity@yahoo.co.uk ** **Womanzone** - discussions, self defence films, socialising and creche. Sat 25th noon-10pm, The London Action Resource Centre, 62 Fieldgate Street, E1. 020 7377 9088, fieldgate@gn.apc.org ** May 29th is **International Day of Action Against Depleted Uranium**. Action planned in the Manchester area. 0161-273-8293 www.cadu.org.uk ** Biotech giants **Monsanto** are taking action to shut down the spoof website www.monsanto.org, check it out now to get the low down on their dirty dealings. ** The field in Dorset that is being squatted by the **Pink Castle** has now unfortunately been two thirds planted with Aventis GM maize. But, the castle remains and actions are taking place to dig up the seeds. Brave knights are still urgently needed to help defend the castle. 07733 640159 www.sayhi.to/thecastle ** A group has recently formed to support asylum seekers arriving at the planned **Bicester Accommodation Centre**. They have their first meeting at the Rainbow Room, Bicester Methodist Church Sheep Street, Sunday 26 May, 4pm - 6pm. BicesterRefugeeSupport@btopenworld.com

Royal Briefs

1 June **Jamboree against the Jubilee** Bristol Centre (Fountains/St Augustines Parade) Contact: black_cat_collective@yahoo.co.uk ** Also on the 1st **Never Mind the Jubilee** The Zion Housing Co-op in association with Hebden Bridge Cricket Club. Third Annual Cricket Festival with live music, fun, frolics, stalls, food and drink. Salem Fields, Hebden Bridge. £2 Tel: 07960 055846 ** And the **Anti-Jubilee Street Festival**. At the Radical Dairy 47 Kynaston Rd., Stoke Newington, London. 020 7249 6996 1pm onwards theradicaldairy@hotmail.com ** 2-4 June **Up the republic! Stuff the Monarchy!** A long weekend of music, debate, videos, talks, practical sessions and direct action at Clwb y Bont, Pontypridd, Wales. For more details of events, accommodation, crêche and tickets, contact PO Box 661, Wrecsam, LL11 1QU Tel 02920 830 029 stuffthemonarchy@yahoo.co.uk

Embargo Farrago

The US embargo on Cuba, which has been in effect for more than 40 years, is set to continue after a speech made by George ‘Dumbya’ Bush just before he jettied off for a fund raising tour of Florida. Incidentally, Miami has a large population of anti-Castro Cuban-Americans who are big supporters of the Republican Party. Bush said that there's no way the embargo would be lifted until elections are held there, which is pretty ironic on two counts. Firstly, the U.S. treats Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, China and Pakistan as their good buddies but in all of these countries elections are as rare as Accrington Stanley FC winning the Champions League. Secondly, cast your mind back to the US elections in 2000, where in Florida, 26,000 votes for the Democrats were not counted leading to Bush becoming president. Double helpings of hypocrisy anybody?

Kernow of Knowledge

It's hard to believe that last month 20,000 people took to the streets of Penzance and there's not even been a whisper of news about it beyond Plymouth. The protest, the largest in Cornish history, was in opposition to the proposed closure of the Accident and Emergency department of West Cornwall Hospital, which according to officials is no longer economic. Closure of the A+E would mean patients would have to travel 35 plus miles to Truro for emergency treatment. A week after the march, a dozen protesters stripped down and blocked the front of the hospital in another attempt to get their message out, but were again ignored apparently because there weren't enough ‘fit birds’. A decision has yet to be made on the future of the hospital, but campaigners have vowed they will do whatever it takes to make sure they keep their A+E unit open.

*SchNEWS VocabWatch Kernow=Cornwall

UN-Independence Day

After an independence struggle that lasted for 24 years and claimed 200,000 lives, East Timor became an independent state on Monday. Just how independent it is though is pretty hard to figure out, considering that their currency is the US dollar, and that most donor countries won't fund the new state unless the money goes through the World Bank. They've also been forced to sign away their oil and gas reserves, the most valuable national resource, to Australia. Australia negotiated a deal with Timor over the oil in which Timor stands to get 90% of the profits on resources taken from a joint Australian/Timor area. Sound good? Take a closer look at the fine print and you find that the richest oil and gas reserves are outside this area and so will be taken over by Australia. So Timor is getting 90% profits of bugger all while Australia gets to take resources from within what should be Timor's maritime boundaries. This may have had something to do with the fact that it was the UN and not the East Timorese Government negotiated the deal. All that Mari Alkatiri, the Timorese prime minister, got to do was sign. Most Timorese don't even know their new nation's resources have already been signed away. More info visit www.etan.org, or www.melbourne.indymedia.org

...and finally...

SchNEWS has heard some cokers in its time, but Councillor Woolsey Smith of the Democratic Unionist Party (Ian Paisley's party) in N. Ireland has got to win a prize for the biggest dumb arse of the year. In the six counties, cycle paths are outlined in green, the road junctions, as ever, are painted white, while the double yellow lines are unsurprisingly painted yellow - which all together make the colours of the Irish flag, green white and gold. According to Councillor Smith, this stunning fact shows bias to the Nationalist community. When the Department of the Environment heard of this ‘complaint’, they thought it was a belated April Fool's prank until they were assured that Woolsey was being quite serious. Now, some members of SchNEWS have at least one time after a mash up party/festival been a tad worse for the wear, but never have they been paranoid about road markings. So Woolsey Smith, if you're reading this, for your own sake start taking some chill pills before the men in white coats come to take you away and lock you up in a padded cell with the leprechauns.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all old buffers with one track minds if ya get side-tracked on the wrong side of the tracks start making tracks before you lose track then you'll be right on track. Honest.