



SHELTER SKELTER

“Group 4 have been a national laughing stock ever since they first blundered into the field of private custodial services... They fouled up the initial stages of the police enquiry by the improper showing of photographs to witnesses; they organised group counseling sessions, risking the contamination of evidence.” - Mr Nigel Rumfitt, prosecuting QC in Yarlswood trial.

In last week's farcical Yarl's Wood trial, four people were found guilty of violent disorder, others who were acquitted were re-arrested in court and taken back into detention. Many potential key witnesses for the trial had been deported soon after the small riot and fire at the £100 million Yarl's Wood 'removals' centre last February. The unrest was set off after Eunice, a 55 year old woman held at Yarl's Wood, was prevented from going to a prayer meeting by prison guards who pinned her to the ground. Through a glass partition male inmates saw her struggling with staff and becoming emotional. They tried to break through the locked door and groups of detainees smashed lights and security cameras and fire was started. Later a Group 4 manager, ordered detainees and staff to be locked inside the burning building.

At the beginning of the trial there were eleven detainees charged with violent disorder, some with arson, on the basis of accusations by Group 4. Some of them were either on a committee set up by detainees to raise complaints about Group 4 or had been vocal at meetings. Several had warned that if detainees were not treated better, they feared serious consequences.

Both Group 4, the private company in charge of running Yarl's Wood, and the Home Office, who put them there, were accused of gross negligence in court and Group 4 was initially treated as a suspect and investigated for the offence of corporate manslaughter by the Bedfordshire police force. Former employee Darren Attwood told the court that they were told to “lock the detainees in the burning building.”

Not that this is the first time Group 4 have been economical with the truth. How about Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre in Oxford, which hosted a disturbance of it's own in 1997? Nine detainees were charged with riot in a case that spectacularly collapsed, as Group 4's evidence was deemed 'unreliable'

The Haslar detention centre has been subject to similar inhuman conditions – there are regular hunger strikes to protest against conditions in the prison, in the last two years there has been four attempted suicides and

in March one man killed himself the night before he was to be deported. SchNEWS has visited Haslar and heard accounts of inedible food, random strip searches, metal dorm-room doors behind which there were no smoke alarms, clear Perspex shower doors, no toilet doors and no privacy. Detainees are kept locked up for sixteen hours a day and that over a hundred people had only one payphone to share in order to make calls to family, friends and legal support.

On top of all of this there are a number of parasitic solicitors who abuse the vulnerable in these centres to get their legal aid handout and do nothing to assist those being kept randomly locked up and simply count their cash. Two Chinese men, whose names were not known by detainees because they couldn't speak English, had received a letter from the Home office informing them they were to be deported. They were unable to understand its contents because they had no access to a translator.

Given these conditions its no wonder people have been trying to escape: Four young Sri Lankans escaped from the detention centre in Gosport on Sunday, after cutting through window bars and scaling the perimeter razor wire topped fence. Apparently they received a file in the post to help their escape! Another detainee escaped two months ago.

Group Free 4 All

Both Haslar and Yarlswood are part of an increasingly repressive immigration policy in the UK and Europe. Last year Home Secretary, David Bland-git, coldly set down quotas of asylum seekers to be expelled. His grand plan would have seen 2500 asylum seekers expelled every month and the 1000 person Yarlswood centre was a pillar for this plan.

As Yarlswood shows, private companies are not the best people to deal with asylum seekers. Group 4 were awarded a 'fast track contract' not only to build the Yarlswood centre but also to run it for 6 years. Six of the nine removal centres in the UK are run by private security firms. Private guards are paid around half what prison officers are paid, with Group 4 recently advertising for new guards offering '£6.95 per hour, no experience necessary.' In general the private guards, entrusted with the care of traumatised refugees, are often grossly racist and provoke the detainees. On the other hand, the great majority of detainees are in the process of applying for asylum and therefore they're not even technically 'illegal'. Unfortunately for them though the purpose of detention, the government admits, is to deter others who might come to this country for refuge. So

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For having a nano blim of pot!

We are talking a really small piece of dope. When it was weighed it came to the staggering weight of 1/50th of a gram. If you were a flea it still couldn't get you stoned. But after 3 days of trial he was found guilty of possession. Stone me - it happened in Britain!

you'll be locked up regardless, mate. There are similar conditions in much of Europe with private companies taking over running asylum centres.

The European Union is pushing for asylum claims to be made from asylum seekers' country of origin, and have put forward a 250 million Euro programme to rapidly kick 'illegal' human beings back to the country they entered the EU from. Nearly 150 million euros is to be spent "harmonising" EU border patrols and co-ordinating their efforts in expelling the 'unwanted'.

Amidst the corporate media frenzy of labeling asylum seekers as 'scroungers', 'terrorists' or 'AIDS infected' a lot of realities are forgotten. Many 'scrounging' asylum seekers work in Britain in low paid jobs that most British refuse, contributing millions to the British Economy. Labeling asylum seekers as 'terrorists' is rather far fetched when you think of the billion dollar western arms industry that supplies dictators in the Majority World with weapons that fuel divisive civil wars. People arrive at our shores fleeing this terror as well as western corporations devouring their resources and then sending the profits of \$50 billion per year back to Western banks. And finally, calling asylum seekers 'diseased' or 'AIDS infected' is downright racist. Every year Majority World governments train thousands of medical staff who are poached by the NHS and other western countries. Then we have the cheek to deport AIDS sufferers back to the hospitals that we've depleted. Maybe asylum seekers are seeking asylum. And maybe we should offer it to them, and question ourselves a bit more and not them.

*Yarl's Wood Campaign meeting Saturday 23rd August, Camden Town Hall, 11am-1pm.

* Boundaries to Bridges Caravan Tour. Activists will be gathering in Almeria, Spain this October before moving through various countries to St. Louis, Senegal by March 2004. The Caravan will serve as a platform for talks, workshops, info-exchanges, parties, circus and theatre performances and will also have a mobile cinema showing documentaries and films covering themes of immigration and frontiers. If you wanna get involved see www.memenet.de/tour.htm

* Recommended reading 'Open Borders: The case against immigration controls' Teresa Hayter, Pluto Press 2000

* We hope to have names and addresses of detainees who would like to receive letters of support in next week's SchNEWS.

WATT'S UP DOC?

As America plunged into the dark ages last week and millions of Americans went without electricity, the message was clear: the terrorists had struck. Except these terrorists weren't your easy-to-target Allah lovers, they were the barons of fossil and nuclear power and their government cronies. Their weapon is an ancient electric grid that's, in their own words, fit for 'a third world country'. It's an insanely fragile device that inefficiently sends electricity from polluting, centralised generating plants to buildings that waste massive amounts of energy and generate none. And it will crash, crash and crash until it's replaced.

The technology exists to replace it now. Back in 1952 a report to President Harry Truman predicted that America's future lay with renewable energy. It envisaged 13 million solar-powered homes by 1975 with the promise of decentralised, off-grid self-sufficiency. Still today solar technologies make energy self-sufficiency a real possibility. Solar panels on roof tops and embedded in windows can produce grid-free electricity. Methane digestion can turn waste into usable gas and basement generators can run on biomass fuels such as ethanol. So why are Americans not using such decentralised, green energy? Why are they relying on a crusty old centralised grid run by a handful of fat-stomached corporations? Well, we're gonna have to break our way through the incestuous web of US business and the state to find out.

Regulations were put in place by Franklin Roosevelt back in the '30s to make sure all energy charges were linked to real expenditures by the energy suppliers, blackouts to hike rates were illegalised and all electricity companies were closely monitored by the federal power commission. Then came Dubya's Daddy and 'deregulation'. Big electricity companies, such as Enron, had been scheming to avoid regulations that imposed huge fines on them for ripping off ratepayers. They decided not to break the rules but to eliminate them altogether and they christened their dodgy little baby 'deregulation'. "It was," according to the investigative journo, Greg Palast, "like a committee of bank robbers figuring out how to make safecracking legal." So with the barons of fossil and nuclear power firmly behind him, Dubya's Daddy gave his corporate chums 'federal deregulation of electricity', which meant they were on the way to taking ratepayers hostage and not having to worry about any pesky fines or regulation things.

To fully deregulate energy consumption the big electricity companies now began to focus on state deregulation. After a massive campaign in California promising electricity bills reduced by 20%, a deregulated San Diego looked at their bills and realised that their 20% savings were swallowed by a 300% jump in surcharges. Becoming more and more powerful in their lawless, deregulated paradise, three power giants began to withhold power from the state of California in the year 2000 and ripped off over \$6 billion in excess charges from ratepayers. After Clinton had imposed price caps on electricity bills in California, Dubya waltzed in to the White House, dancing to a \$16 million tune from the power companies, and immediately blew the caps away. At the same time, New York's Republican Governor, George Pataki, ripped the lid off electricity prices and relieved the Niagara Mohawk power company of the annoying duty of maintaining the grid system.

So now after being plunged into the dark ages are Americans gonna finally think about how much energy they consume? Is the corporate media gonna run stories about the necessity of decentralised, self-sufficient, green energy? Is George Bush gonna break with his power baron chums and overhaul a rotten, centralised energy grid? Course not. This is the American state and big business we're talking about. Bush has just pushed through a law to "upgrade the grid" which, in the words of Harvey Wasserman, is "a new money pit for the same old unsafe nukes, polluting coal burners and gas turbines all looped together by dangerous, wasteful wires that are bound to crash again and again." See: www.zmag.org

MARMOSET ON TOAST

The verdict is expected soon on the University of Cambridge's proposed Primate Testing Centre, The Centre would house a breeding colony of some 400-500 marmosets in tiny, barren metal cages; the animals would then be used in neurological experiments and endure horrific suffering at the hands of the researchers

The Science Minister at the Department for Trade and Industry Lord Sainsbury and the University has touted its "essential" purpose in solving human neurological disorders. The governments claims are bogus as Dr Ray Greek of Europeans For Medical Advancement confirms, "Everything we know about Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other specifically human neurological disorders has been learned from studying humans and their tissues... *Mutilating monkeys helps no-one and actually harms patients by misleading researchers and diverting them from more productive avenues of research, such as brain-scanning and clinical research.*"

Stopping the centre is essential if the battle against animal testing facilities is to be moved forward, according to Professor Roger Lemon director of the Institute of Neurology "It would effectively be a signal that would block any new animal-research facility for the foreseeable future."

Protest on 23 August, Parkers Piece. September 3 public meeting, 11 October National rally all in Cambridge.

Stop Primate Experiments at Cambridge
07957588253 www.primatetesting.org

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SchNEWS in brief

Yesterday the head office of Spearhead, the company organizing Europe's largest arms fair, **Defence Systems Equipment international (DSEi)** was occupied by protesters. The "fair" will happen at the Excel Centre in London next month and a week of protests have been organized. Actions are happening around the country in the lead up to DSEi: On 31st August there's a Cardiff Disarm DSEi Day from 1pm at East Moors Community Centre, Sanquhar St, Splott. Contact: 07754 585856 <http://uk.msnusers.com/cardiffsocialforum/messageboard.msnw> On 1st September there's an anti-DSEi disco benefit night at Notting Hill arts club along with visuals and films from Guerilla TV, info - anti.dsei.disco@errorware.co.uk For more information about Disarm DSEi actions see www.dsei.org ** **Anti war protesters have won the right to challenge the police** against the draconian powers they used at the Fairford demo on 22nd March. 3 coaches were stopped on the way there and then made to go back to London. ** **Gillette** have abandoned the use of **RFID smart-chips** in products following a recent trial of the technology in Tesco's supermarket in Cambridge (SchNEWS 415), which attracted protests by local residents. Following the recent protest in Cambridge against the introduction of smart-chips to track in-store product movements. In Boston, the home of Gillette the Boston Globe ran an article on the issue and within hours Gillette announced they would be abandoning the use of RFID in products. ** **Ladyfest** - four days and nights of 'oes-trogen fuelled fun... to showcase, celebrate and encourage the musical and artistic talents of women.' 4-7 September, Zion Arts, Stretford Rd, Hulme, Manchester. 0777 612 6525 www.ladyfestmanchester.org ** **Brighton Alliance of Sound Systems** Random Party this Saturday (23) @ Concorde2 Madeira Drive, Brighton 10pm-3am. £3 www.bass23.org ** **Ska Punk Losers** have a homecoming concert on Saturday 6th September for **Neil Bartlett** who has spent the past two years inside for animal rights stuff. Littlehampton Railway Club, opp. The train station. Doors open 6.30 pm and it's £4 www.splshows.cjb.net ** **A new squatted social centre** has opened in Newtown, Wales. Music, food and cinema are all on offer. Call 0402 522485 after 12pm on Sunday 24th for directions. ** **Benefit gig for Brighton Peace and Environment Centre.** Attila the Stockbroker and Rob Johnson at the Kings and Queens pub on Marlborough Place, 7.30pm 29th. £8/£5. ** If you're handy with computers and want to become part of the **SchNEWS web design** team on a Thursday evening get in touch with the office.

...and finally...

While the fight against the building of the new A30 at Fairmile in Devon (See SchNEWS 103) was happening the local pub, the Fairmile Inn, refused to serve the eco-warriors who were living in the protest camps (Remember them?). But now thanks to the new road the pub has lost all its passing trade and has been forced to close through lack of punters! What do they say about karma? Or is it just time for one for the road?

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all committed readers we still seek refuge in your generosity. Honest.