



WAKE UP!! YER LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 20th February 2004

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Issue 442

THE CONSUMPTION CHAIN



SHOP 'TIL THEY DROP

Race to the Bottom

The Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay brought the plight of undocumented migrants in Britain into the spotlight. We were told how the unfortunate victims were trafficked and exploited by ruthless gangs of 'snakeheads'. We solemnly frown when we hear how gang masters prey on the vulnerable victims of mafias. But these problems have wider and deeper causes.

The 'illegal' immigrants are vulnerable to exploitation precisely because of their (lack of) legal status. They have no rights, are terrified of being deported, and can't go to the authorities for help. The government claims to be dealing with the 'problem', while the situation stays the same. So, who benefits from this crime and why is nothing done to change the situation?

At the top of the chain of command is the government and their chums the big corporate supermarkets who control the food you eat. They have totally changed food shopping in the last fifty years, from the days of small, independent shops to the dominance of the 'big four' supermarkets: Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury and Safeway. These four control 60-75% of grocery sales in the UK. The biggest and the baddest of the lot is Tesco - which receives a staggering £1 of every £8 spent in the UK! The supermarkets say they stack 'em high and sell 'em cheap. People flock to their promises of bargains, choice and 'convenience' (see SchNEWS 295 and 140).

Supermarkets claim to respond to consumer demand, and a recent survey by the Food Standards Agency in 2001 supports this. 46% of people responded that price was the key issue for choosing their food. But supermarkets are not actually that cheap. Some products are, such as bread and milk, because supermarkets use them as 'loss leaders' to convince the customer that their store is cheap. Everybody knows the price of milk and bread, but other products which people are less familiar with are priced quite highly in supermarkets, and are available more cheaply, healthfully and ethically in local independent shops. This is especially true of fresh fruit and vegetables. The 'cheap food' that the supermarkets claim to sell actually comes at a very high price to taxpayers, small manufacturers, small farmers and the environment.

"Food is actually very expensive. We end up paying for it three times - once at the market, a second time via taxes for subsidies, and a third time to clean up the environmental and health mess," says ecologist, Professor Jules Pretty. He has calculated that the hidden costs of industrial agriculture to our health and environment add up to at least £2.3 billion a year!

A Competition Commission Report on supermarkets highlights examples of exploitative supermarket practices. One big issue is the supermarkets' refusal to enter into binding contractual agreements with suppliers, leaving suppliers with no financial guarantees.

The suppliers are forced in turn to cut as many costs as they can and rely on a highly flexible and exploitable workforce. The exploitation of undocumented foreign workers, i.e. what happened at Morecambe Bay, is a result of supermarkets' relentless race to the bottom for the lowest wages and costs, bypassing irritating things like rights and unions. The tiresome contracts committing them to buy specific amounts of produce at specific prices would help suppliers plan their factory rotas and have more organised labour forces. But these contracts involve supermarkets in the risk of buying too much or too little. Instead, retailers order "just in time" from wherever is cheapest in the world, waiting for their barcode scanning and your loyalty(!) card to tell them how much consumers are buying. They demand the exact amounts from suppliers and have them delivered as quickly as possible. Suppliers must respond to these demands to survive. They pass the risk down the line to those at the bottom of the chain, to labourers who are turned on and off like a tap to meet demand. If necessary they are kept working, regardless of the dangers they face, until the orders are finished.

European workers won't tolerate the conditions this new model creates. We in Europe like to imagine that we left behind the brutal pecking order of the docks, or the semi-slave hours of the textile factories years ago. But the 'cheap food' system needs excesses of "flexible" labour to survive. For the new system to work, a surplus of people desperate for any job to come along is needed. This is where the migrants fit in; they are desperate and without rights.

To find out more about the evils of Supermarkets: www.corporatewatch.org.uk/profiles/food_supermarkets/whats_wrong_suprmkts.html

* No Sweat are seeking 7 dwarves, one pale woman, 2 mice, 2 dogs, 1 duck, 1 prince charming, 1 insomniac woman and a regal big cat for some sing-a-long-and-chaos-causing action taking place in Brighton on international women's day to protest at the exploitation of female sweatshop workers by high street brands. Email mick@nosweat.org.uk if you want to help.

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For advertising a book fair...

Three women were arrested in Haringey last October for putting up posters advertising a community bookfair. The women were arrested for "criminal damage" by two van loads of coppers after putting an A4 size poster onto a giant billboard. The most illegal thing about the whole situation, however, seems to be the billboard itself, as no planning permission was given for it, or for 48 out of the 50 other billboards along the same road. The companies involved have had no legal action taken against them at all for erecting the massive, unsightly and illegal posters, which we're sure don't advertise anything as nice as community bookfairs.

Slavemarketed

Big corporations also 'outsource' jobs to poor countries where workers can be exploited in the same way. The textile industry is particularly guilty, with their notorious 'sweat shops', which compete for the cheapest and most exploitable labour force.

Haiti is an example of the 'free trade frontline'. 80% of the population live in poverty, despite President Aristide's promises of reform. Misery was further increased in 2000 by the decisions of international donors including the U.S. and EU, to suspend virtually all aid. By 2003, the suspended aid and loans totalled more than \$500 million.

In an attempt to turn the economy around, a deal was struck with the US. The World Bank agreed to fund new 'free trade zones' (FTZs) in Haiti. In April 2002, work started on one of Haiti's most fertile agricultural regions, the Maribahoux Plain, to build the first free trade zone factory, where Haitian workers are now making Levi's for very low wages. But the plan doesn't stop there. Seventeen FTZs are expected to stretch along the entire length of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Haiti is on the brink of civil war, as the campaign to oust Jean-Bertrand Aristide heightens. Fifty people have been killed so far and possibly more in Gonaives. Yesterday, Aristide called for international help to prevent a humanitarian disaster. The US has refused to step in and is putting pressure on Aristide to step down. Perhaps they want a leader they can make even more FTZ agreements with. This couldn't have come at a more ironic time, as Haiti celebrates the 200th anniversary of its independence, when slave armies rose up against their French colonial masters.

<http://haitisupport.gn.apc.org/www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=2&ItemID=4997>

SchNEWS in brief

Take action at a **BP Baku-Ceyhan pipeline greenwash event** 10am, next Friday (24) at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Stratton Street, London. 01865 241 097 www.risingtide.org.uk ** **Balata Camp Installation coming to Britain**, can you help? Mika and Kelly (ISMers who have been to Nablus) are looking for people to arrange dates and venues, March 10th - April 15th Contact john@ism-london.org** **Ewa Jasiewicz has just returned to the UK after spending over nine months in Iraq**, and is eager to speak to groups around the country who can cover her travel costs. She'll be at the Quaker International Centre, Byng Place, Malet St, London, 2nd March. 7.30pm To book her 0845 4582564 ** To mark next Tuesday's (24) **international day of action against the corporate invasion of Iraq** there's a demo outside Bechtel's office at 11 Pilgrim Street, London (near Blackfriars tube) 11am www.voicesuk.org ** **Libertarian Parent and Kid Drop-in** every Monday from March 1st, 4:30-6:30pm, Autonomy Club, Freedom Bookshop, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High St. libertarianparents@yahoo.co.uk ** **Were you arrested at DSEi arms fair last year?** Moss & Co. solicitors have police helicopter video evidence of a number of arrests. If you are up on charges, you or your solicitor should contact Andrew Katzen: 020 8986 8336 ** Meet to discuss **May 1st: Days of Action against the Bosses** next Saturday (28) 12 noon starting with lunch. At the Occupied Social Centre, 93 Fortress Road, Kentish Town, London. www.wombles.org.uk ** **The Revolution will not be Televised** (about the Venezuelan revolution) and other films, showing next Wednesday (25) 7.30pm, Cube Cinema, Kings Square, Bristol, £3/£2. <http://bristol.indymedia.org> ** **Save Hayle Beach, Cornwall** from developers who want to extract the sand. www.soshayle.fsnet.co.uk ** This week is the **tenth anniversary of the M11** eviction, the most expensive eviction ever in Britain, and a source of inspiration to road protesters everywhere. See the feature at www.indymedia.org.uk ** **National Day of Action against STA Travel's involvement in Burma** to raise awareness about responsible tourism March 1st. bcuk_students@yahoo.co.uk or visit www.burmacampaign.org.uk for details. ** Find out about the **Coke boycott** by the Colombian trade union, Southsea Community Centre, King St, Southsea, Portsmouth, March 2nd 7pm 023 9225998 www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk ** **The NUS and the Higher Education Union are calling for a national strike** next week on Tues (24) and Wed (25) to protest against top-up fees and low wages for staff. Join the picket lines at Sussex University on Tues (24) at 11am ** **More mailout help needed** on Fridays - call SchNEWS office.

TRAVELLER UPDATE

"First they closed down most of the Council Traveller sites and told them to buy their own land... then they told them they couldn't have planning permission... so now there's a concerted drive to evict them, grab their land (and flog it to developers)... and push them back on the sides of roads where they can be screwed under the Criminal Justice Act."

In the past month, two self-owned traveller sites have fought battles with 'gypsy eviction specialist' bailiffs Constant & Co: Bulkington near Coventry which ended in a victory, and Meadowlands in Essex where the residents were evicted, then some of their homes torched by arsonists. Other sites are now under current threat.

An action network is being set up to defend traveller communities from eviction beginning with a meeting this Saturday (21st) at 4 Sutton St London (tubes Aldgate East or Whitechapel) at 3pm. There will be films and talks about the recent evictions. nooneisillegal2003@yahoo.co.uk 07963603111

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IN-JUNK-TION

In last week's SchNEWS, we wrote about how Costain (the evil road-building company) had taken out an injunction against anyone who dared to protest against them building a road at Blackwood in Wales. The injunction that Costain took out is a civil injunction, so breaking it is not a criminal offence. The police won't usually get involved in a civil injunction, which means it would only be Costain who took you to court if you broke it.

Bayer Cropsience (SchNEWS 436), who want to spread GM crops all over Britain, have become so fed up with the constant protests against them that they are trying to ban them altogether using another type of injunction. On Friday in the High Court, their temporary injunction against protesters was made permanent. If you break this injunction, it is a criminal offence and would make you 'in contempt of court' with up to five years in prison or a hefty fine to look forward to.

This type of injunction was created under the Protection from Harassment Act, which was supposedly introduced to protect women from stalkers, but is now used to silence protesters. In the past, it has been used extensively against animal rights campaigners, in particular the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty campaign (SHAC). These types of injunctions are initially granted without the defendants having any right of say. The company's lawyer simply turns up with his witness statements and the judge usually gives it the nod.

The injunctions are supposedly granted to protect employees from being harassed by protesters, but they also create exclusion zones around company premises. Large-scale protests are not allowed in any of the exclusion zones

Lucky for Some

Friday the 13th is supposed to be an unlucky day, but not for Simon Chapman and 12 other people arrested at the E.U. summit in Thessaloniki last June. Last Friday, all 13 defendants had their charges dropped by the Greek authorities! To add to this good news, there's also the fact that another 6 arrestees have had their charges changed from felonies to misdemeanours, and another 8 cases are still under investigation, with hopes running high that these cases will also be dropped. "This is great news for some of us," said Simon. "But of the 29 charged as a result of the 21 June insurrection, there remain many brother and sisters under charges. The actions and benefits must continue: anyone could have been fucked the way we were... My freedom means nothing without the freedom of my brothers and sisters. The struggle continues." A final decision on the remaining 8 could come as early as next week.

* Benefit night for the prisoners and the animal rights mag Arkangel Sat 21st at Chats Palace, 49 Brooksbys Walk, Hackney, East London. 7.30pm - 11pm

Positive SchNEWS

Brighton Peace and Environment Centre is finally re-opening in their new community-owned building near the train station. To celebrate this, a parade has been organised on Saturday, 28th February starting at 4.30 pm at the old Peace Centre in Gardner Street and continuing to the new centre in Surrey Street and then onto the Sallis Benney Theatre. The Centre is looking for more local campaigning groups to attend - call them 01273 766611 www.bpec.org

* **Sherwood Forest, Nine Ladies, and Blackwood** protest sites are all still there but still need your help. Get down there and show the bailiffs what you think of 'em! For more info, see www.schnews.org.uk/pap/protestcamps.htm or call for Blackwood: 07811 948764 / 07708 420446 for Nine Ladies: 07005 942 212 or for Sherwood: 07050 656410

meaning big protests outside a company's headquarters are banned once they have an injunction and wildly threatening behaviour such as handing out leaflets or banging a drum can get you arrested! This type of injunction also seeks to stop protesters putting out information about the company, and bans the named protest groups from having websites or circulating literature that discusses the company.

So how does this affect protest? Well for a start, although injunctions sought to close them down, the SHAC websites and Stop Bayer GM Crops websites are still up and running. Secondly, for the injunction to be implemented against a person, it has to be proved that said person is either one of the persons named on the injunction or part of one of the groups named on it. What has usually happened, though, is that the first time you protest, a person working for the company will present the injunction to you and then you will be covered by it. But as one protester told SchNEWS, "Injunctions often inject new life into campaigns as people feel outraged by the blatant repression and use fresh creativity and imagination to explore new tactics in response."

Now it just so happens that the lawyers behind all these injunctions are Lawson-Cruttenden, who specialize in the Harassment Act and are now making a nice little earner from stamping down on the right to protest. If you wish to find out more about them see www.lawson-cruttenden.co.uk or if you require their services phone 020 7405 0833.

For a look at these injunctions see www.shac.net/MISC/legal/legal.html. For more on the campaign against Bayer's GM crops see: www.stopbayergm.org

Coach-napped

Protesters who were stopped from going to an anti-war demonstration at RAF Fairford last March won their case in the High Court yesterday - sort of.

On March 22, 2003, people on three separate coaches on their way to Fairford were stopped, searched for two hours, then escorted back to London. The court ruled that police abused common law and that the detention was "wholly disproportionate" and awarded costs against the cops. However, the court did back the police's claim that they "reasonably and honestly" believed that breaches of the peace would have occurred if the coaches had reached Fairford. Breach of the Peace? - er, what about Fairford being the airbase where B52 bombers took off from in order to bomb the people of Iraq? www.fairfordcoachaction.org.uk/

* There'll be speakers from Liberty, Bindmans Solicitors, Amnesty, Statewatch plus a couple of movies of the coach kidnapping next Thursday (26) at the School of Oriental & African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London. 7pm

* During the anti-war protests at Fairford, cops used the stop and search powers of the Terrorism Act to carry out 2,132 searches over a period of just 52 days.

Inside SchNEWS

French shepherd René Riesel was sentenced to seven months in December (he hopes to be released in March) after destroying a Novartis GMO field crop trial as well as sabotaging one of Novartis's labs. René is an anti-capitalist who has refused to claim for a presidential pardon and rejects any kind of "support" from political parties, official unions or reformist groups. You can send letters (preferably in French!!) to René RIESEL, n° d'écrou 4612, Maison d'Arrêt, 37 chemin Séjélan, 48000 MENDE, France.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers...if yer a slave to a supermarket sweep yer off yer trolley. Honest!