



# Croaker Cola

Del-Boy would have been proud. Stick some tap water in a fancy bottle, give it a poncey name, brag about the "highly sophisticated purification process" based on Nasa spacecraft technology and then sell it back to the public with an astronomical markup! But in true Trotter style the scam seriously back-fired for Coca-Cola last week when its entire UK supply of Dasani water was pulled off the shelves because it has been contaminated with bromate, a cancer-causing chemical.

But while in the UK Coke are just busy ripping off their customers and encouraging people to drink a can which contains six sugarcubes, across the world their fizzy pop actions are a lot more life and death.

Colombia is not the place to be if you are a trade unionist - over 3,000 have been murdered since 1987 - eight of those trade unionists were working at Coke bottling plants. One of them Isidro Segundo Gil was killed inside a Coke bottling plant and his wife murdered by the paramilitaries for campaigning for justice. These Colombian bottlers are now part of a legal action in the US under the Alien Tort Claims Act, which accuses the company of collaborating or hiring paramilitaries to murder, torture kidnap and disappear Coca Cola workers and trade unionists.

Last September Coca-Cola's largest Colombian bottler, closed the production lines at 11 of their 16 plants and launched a new offensive against union-affiliated workers in an effort to break support for the food and drink workers union, Sinaltrainal. The company imprisoned workers by force in factories or hotels and pressured them to renounce their employment contracts in return for a measly payout. Then the bottlers suddenly sacked 91 workers from their plants, 70% of whom are union organisers.

So twelve days ago to try to draw world attention to the situation 30 of these sacked workers began a hunger strike in front of six Coke bottling plants. One of them Juan Carlos Galvis, vice president of the local union said, "If we lose the fight against Coca-Cola, we will first lose our union, next our jobs, and then our lives." He should know. Last August there was an assassination attempt against him, and just a few months ago, in December, his brother-in-law was brutally murdered in an incident that many human rights groups have linked to anti-union thugs. Just a week into the protest and strikers are already being threatened by the paramilitary who issued

a statement declaring "They must leave or they will become a military target and we will finish them off."

## Coke of Secrecy

Insufficient rains for the past three years has pushed the state of Kerala in India to a severe drought-like situation. Reports from across the state say that the water levels in reservoirs are going down fast, crops are perishing and towns and villages have been hit by drinking water scarcity. So what are the caring Coca-Cola Company that "exists to benefit and refresh everyone it touches" doing? Sucking peoples water dry so they can produce their sugary crap of course.

Coke have been the focus of protests across India for the past few years. In Plachimada in the state of Kerla the company arrived three years ago, building a plant in the middle of fertile agricultural land because it had plentiful supplies of groundwater. But it wasn't long before problems began. Farmers living nearby began noticing changes in the quantity and quality of well water. Water from a well in the village of Plachimada became unfit for drinking, cooking and bathing with a district medical officer eventually telling the villagers their water was now toxic. Crop yields began to plummet. The water scarcity eventually hit Coke. Until recently, the company was drawing 1.5 million litres a day from the common groundwater resource - then it is only able to extract 800,000 litres - the remainder being brought in by truck from borewells from neighbouring villages. Fed up with this people recently blocked two of these transporters and instead distributed the water to local people and emptied the remaining water into paddy fields!

But while complaints and requests to the company and Government repeatedly fell on deaf ears locals began an indefinite picket (or 'agitation' as they call it) outside the factory gates demanding its closure. So far they've been there for nearly seven hundred days with over 300 arrests. Now due to the severe drought the local authority has refused to renew the companies license to operate. The vice-president of Coca-Cola India, Sunil Gupta said: "We have a long-term commitment to the people of Kerala. We hope the State Government would explore the possibility of finding a solution to the present problem of water availability due to deficient rain in the last couple of years." SchNEWS reckons that solution would be for the

## CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For disorderly use of a camcorder(!) or something like that, no-one seems to be sure, including the arresting officers. An anti-war demonstrator at last Saturdays rally in London was arrested and charged under section 5 of the Public Orders Act. His crime? Filming the demonstrators and cops as the march wound it's way through the capital. Apparently the cops didn't like it so found it in themselves to arrest the individual, confiscating his film as "evidence".

company to stop stealing the peoples water and buggar off out of India.

When you look at just two examples of how Coke are behaving across the world you have to ask yourself - what would happen if any of us did the same. Intimidating and shooting people who joined trade unions, or stealing and contaminating peoples' water supply? But then it's not people doing this but a powerful multinational whose actions Medha Patkar, coordinator of the Indian National Alliance of People's Movements says "are symbolic of the vulgar arrogance and criminal power of corporations." Or as Joel Bakan put it in his new book 'The corporation: the pathological pursuit of profit and power' "As a psychopathic creature, the corporation can neither recognise nor act upon moral reasons to refrain from harming others. Nothing in its legal make-up limits what it can do to others in pursuit of its selfish ends, and it is compelled to cause harm when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs." It's up to people to make sure that the costs to these psychopaths make it impossible for them to keep getting away with such behaviour.

For more about Colombia and the worldwide boycott campaign [www.killercoke.org/](http://www.killercoke.org/) For more on Indian protests [www.indiaresource.org/](http://www.indiaresource.org/)

\* There's a vigil this Friday (26) 7.30 p.m. onwards to coincide with negotiations between Colombian union and senior managers, followed by a picket tomorrow (27) 11 am to 3pm Both outside Coca Cola Great Britain and Ireland HQ, 1 Queen Charlotte Street, Hammersmith, London W6 (adjacent to Hammersmith tube). 07743 743041

\* Former Coke Chief Executive Roberto Goizueta defined the world as "Coke versus people who don't drink Coke yet." This sort of expansionist megalomania has meant that the company has willingly jumped into bed with anyone in order to expand its empire. One of those was the Nazi regime, where Coke produced some impressive adverts that for some reason are now hard to come by. So comedian Mark Thomas has organised an exhibition to recreate Coke's Nazi adverts in May at the Nancy Victor Gallery, 36 Charlotte Street, London W1T 2NA and at The Foundry, near Old Street Tube. Anyone is welcome to submit artwork [www.mtcp.co.uk/coca-cola/](http://www.mtcp.co.uk/coca-cola/)

## RIGHTS FOR \$ALE

On Sunday the new Constitutional Court building was opened in Johannesburg, but ten years after the end of Apartheid, many poor South Africans are still denied their constitutional rights to water, basic services, and the right to protest. Privatization of water and public services in South Africa continues. Local people have been mobilizing to protest against the privatizations which have seen water bills rocket, and thousands cut off from their water supplies for non-payment of bills. (see SchNEWS 368).

Last Sunday, police opened fire with stun grenades on members of the Gauteng Anti-Privatization Forum (APF). Fifty-two APF members were arrested, including 6 children, for violating the Gatherings Act. The arrests came after APF representatives in some of Johannesburg's poorest communities were forcefully prevented from boarding buses to a demonstration. Others gathered at the Police Station where their comrades were being held, and were shot at after being given three minutes to disperse. The 52 were finally released on Monday after being charged with participating in an illegal gathering.

The Gatherings Act is an Apartheid era law, which gives police powers to ban or interfere with legitimate protests. On Thursday, the Police denied permission for the Coalition against Water Privatisation (the original organisers of the protest) to protest, on the grounds that the protest would be violent (no previous APF protests have been violent), would disrupt traffic (on a Sunday!) and would constitute a threat to law and order. The Coalition appealed against the decision, but saw their case overturned on a technicality.

Sixty people have been arrested this week for violating the Gatherings Act. Eight were arrested in Cape Town on Wednesday when they protested against the South African - Angolan decision to repatriate thousands of Angolans, despite a continuing lack of human rights in Angola.

What is happening in South Africa has been described as "flag and anthem independence" where people wonder whether all the sacrifices they've made in struggle have been worth it. The working class protesters, mostly women and pensioners, continue to be arrested, evicted, removed forcibly from their own homes and imprisoned as they struggle against governments who deny them the most basic of rights such as water.

Similar repression and privatization is taking place all over the world. (see SchNEWS 339). If there is one lesson developing nations can learn from us in the 'developed' world, it's that privatization has been a total disaster for ordinary people. \*\*E-mail Dale McKinley at [drdalet@metroweb.co.za](mailto:drdalet@metroweb.co.za) to make donations to pay bail or for updates on the APF detainees.

\* \*This Saturday African Liberation Support Campaign Network meeting - what is the network? What is its relevance to the African liberation struggle? Unity Centre, 2 - 4 Ravenstone St, Balham, London SW12, 4pm-8pm 020 8347 7605 [nkexplor@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nkexplor@yahoo.co.uk)

**HELP! We don't want you're money this week (well we do, but won't go on) but we seriously need a few more people helping doing some writing. So we are having another Training Day on Wednesday 7 April 12 noon at SchNEWS Towers. Sorry but its only open to people who live in the Brighton area. Give us a call or email for directions.**

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## BLACKWOOD CAMP

The ten year campaign to protect St Davids Wood at Blackwood (See SchNEWS 441) from being turned into the access road for an industrial area is in its final stage. This week the camps protecting the woods were evicted - but it's not too late to defend the last camp - get down there now, but ring the first on 07811948764 or 07708420446.

Bailiffs and cops moved in on Tuesday, securing the land over the next few days. A cordon is now ringed around the site, but some of the camp still exists outside the cordon. This eviction was done on dodgy legal grounds because it is taking place during an appeal against the legality of the whole project. If the appeal goes in favour of the protesters the eviction will have been illegal and Costain - the project contractors, the bailiffs and police could all be found in contempt of court. It is notable that police haven't charged anyone for resisting the eviction - knowing the dubious legal status of the operation. Residents from the camp told SchNEWS that the bailiffs had been bought in for Blackwood and would be moving onto Sherwood Forest or Nine Ladies next.

\* The Sherwood Forest tree camp have won a two month reprieve due to the council agreeing to an independent inquiry into the feasibility of the road junction.

\* It seems that a whole load of road schemes could be resurrected, but in typical Neo-Labour spin, these are to be "re-branded": so the Hastings Bypass becomes the "Bexhill to Hastings Link Road"; the Salisbury bypass becomes the "Harnham relief road and Brunel link" and even the Arundel bypass rejected last July may rear its ugly head again soon, all this comes after the Government abandoned its target of reducing congestion and say car growth will grow by a fifth by 2011. [www.roadalert.org.uk](http://www.roadalert.org.uk)

## SchNEWS in brief

Protest against the internment of people under terrorism laws at **Belmarsh Prison**, with speakers, live performance & signing of expressions of solidarity with the detainees being held without trial. Belmarsh Prison, Western Way, London SE28, 4th April from 12 noon, 020 72501315 / 07818 442526, [www.cacc.org.uk](http://www.cacc.org.uk) \*\* Next Saturday (3) is the **Black Cat Press Freethinker's Book Fayre** - something for everyone to read, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. 11am-4.45pm. \*\* There will be a memorial service on Easter Sunday on the route of the **Birmingham Northern Relief Road** (now the M6 Toll) at the former Greenwood Site for Sorted Dave - who died during the protest, and Sgt Mick Belcher, (apparently an old-style country policeman friendly to protesters) who had his ashes scattered there. Meet at Canwell Caravans on the A38. 07742 206004 \*\* While there have been **Travellers** in Britain since time immemorial, and their way of life has been subject to attack and prejudice - particularly in the past twenty years in Britain. There will be an evening to focus on Travellers and how they can be supported - with films about recent evictions as well as food and bar - at the Social Centre at 156 Fortess Rd Tufnell Park, London on 1st April 7pm. \*\* April 8th is **International Romani Day**. [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org) \*\* **Bristol Indymedia** are screening 'Afghan massacre - convoy of death' and some short community films next Monday (29) 7.30pm at The Cube Microplex, Kings Sq, Bristol <http://bristol.indymedia.org> \*\* The first meeting of **South West London Anarchist Group** is happening next Tuesday (30) 6pm at the Bread n' Roses Pub, 68 Clapham Manor St London, SW4 6DZ [swag@riseup.net](mailto:swag@riseup.net) \*\* **The Land is Ours and Chapter 7** will have a **Land Occupation and Low Impact Dwelling Convention** over the Easter Weekend (8-13th April). Events include the construction of another turf-roofed roundhouse and a protest against the demolition of the Roundhouse (SchNEWS 443) at the planning offices. 01460 249204

## SchNEWS At Ten

SchNEWS has its tenth birthday this November. To celebrate we will be putting together a book and a film covering the exciting events of the past decade, as seen through the eyes of SchNEWS crew past and present. We are calling out for photos, flyers, and video (any format) of events from the last ten years. Contact the SchNEWS office.

## DAMBUSTERS

A massive hydroelectric dam is to be built in Belize which will flood an area which according to scientists is "one of the most biologically rich and diverse regions remaining in Central America," it is home to endangered species such as the jaguar, tapir, and the last 200 remaining scarlet macaws in Belize.

\* The Itoiz dam in Spain is now being filled, but anti-dam activists are planning to stop it - "Our objective is to paralyze the dam works... Sometimes we stop the work for minutes, sometimes for weeks, sometimes for days - but our objective is to paralyze the works." Read an interview with the activists: [www.corporatewatch.org/news/dambusters.htm](http://www.corporatewatch.org/news/dambusters.htm)

\* The Indian govt are raising the water levels of the Sardar Sarovar dam project by a further 10 metres, which will submerge thousands of peoples' land, on top of the many who have already lost their land to dam catchment areas. [www.narmada.org](http://www.narmada.org)

## Inside SchNEWS

Mehdi El-Radhi - a British Iraqi stopped and-searched under the Terrorism Act and later arrested for taking direct action on the Docklands Light Rail against the DSEi Arms Fair in London last year - will be appearing for a full jury trial at Snaresbrook Crown Court, London on Monday (29). He faces charges under the railways-specific Malicious Damage Act. Support in court is welcome 07792136765 [mehdielradhi@yahoo.com](mailto:mehdielradhi@yahoo.com)

\* Good news. Stuart Tideswell (SchNEWS 445) has had his conviction for harassment of benefit staff overturned and he should now be entitled to claim compensation. This victory means that it may be harder for companies and government departments to use anti-stalking laws against people making complaints.

\* We have received more information about Helen Woodson, her original conviction was for taking a pneumatic jackhammer to a Minuteman nuclear missile silo in Missouri. She has taken further actions because she was released on parole against her wishes, she would rather have total freedom or none.

\* The three women arrested for flyposting on a billboard that did not have planning permission (SchNEWS 442) have had their charges of criminal damage dropped. In their local area 48 out of the 50 billboards are illegal as they do not have planning permission, so will the billboard companies be prosecuted or have them removed? Don't hold your breath...

## ...and finally...

Some like it hot...Kings of Fizz Coca Cola have unveiled plans for a new type of vending machine. Sensitive to the climate outside, the machine raises the price of a can as the weather gets hotter. That bastion of socialist economics, Pepsi, have accused Coca Cola of "exploiting consumers in hotter climates".

## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers we never bottle the truth when it comes to Coke and rum dealings... Honest!