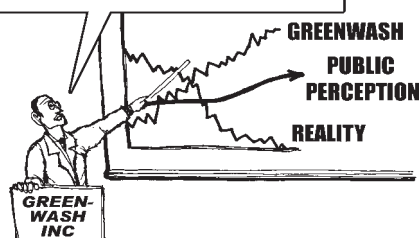


YOU CAN IMPROVE PUBLIC PERCEPTION BY OFFSETTING THE REALITY OF YOUR PROJECT WITH MORE INVESTMENT IN GREENWASH INC



NORM RULES OK?

“It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality” Morris Wolfe, PR consultant

Last month was the annual meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights where one of the hottest topics up for discussion was the ‘UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with regard to Human Rights’ (or ‘Norms’ for short). The Commission eventually decided to give the Norms a 5-year mandate to develop and try them out further.

These norms aren’t another bureaucratic attempt to bore us into submission but are proposed decency guidelines for multinational corporations to stick too. The norms ask companies to respect the laws of the countries they operate in, ensure equal opportunities and avoid racism and sexism. More troublesome for the corporations will be the proposed clause asking them not to profit from war crimes, genocide, torture, and violations of international law. The norms also include workers rights (to form unions for example), avoidance of bribery and corruption, fair business practice, protecting consumers from harmful products and environmental protection. Which seem pretty reasonable to us here at SchNEWS Towers, but not of course to big business which feels it is obviously above such silly ‘red tape’ and would rather ‘regulate’ itself.

Corporate lobby groups such as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) launched a fierce campaign to kill off the proposal in the run up to the meeting, with the ‘gurus of greenwash’ Shell playing a leading role. But what is all the fuss really about when all these ‘Norms’ are just a way of trying to get multinational corporations to obey existing laws and international treaties on the environment and human rights? Right-wing governments and business groups have managed to get a disclaimer added to the conclusion which means that the Norms still do not have any official status, but at least they will stay in the pipeline for the next five years.

In fact these regulations actually already exist in UN treaties such as the Convention Against Torture or in human and labour rights conventions. The idea of the Norms is to bring together these treaties and close a loophole in the law to make them apply to multinational corporations - who could face compensation claims if they ignore them.

SHELL OUT

It may come as a surprise to some that oil giant Shell are leading the opposition to these proposed norms, claiming that they

don’t find them helpful because well, they already have such high human rights standards! Their website proudly proclaims, “Shell works hard to meet environmental commitments and we invest time and money to improve environmental performance beyond that required by legislation” and that, “The welfare of our staff and the communities in which we live and work is fundamental to our approach to business”. Shell’s publicity is full of this type of drivel: “Our core values of honesty, integrity and respect for people define who we are and how we work. These values have been embodied for more than 25 years in our business principles, which since 1997 include a commitment to support human rights and to contribute to sustainable development.” And you couldn’t get more sustainable than oil now could you?

In early March a scandal around Shell’s overstatement of its oil reserves forced Chief Executive Phil Watts to resign, but you wouldn’t find any Shell top brass resigning over its overstating of green credentials. Recent reports from Friends of the Earth and Christian Aid documents Shell’s operations in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, that are still causing serious problems for local communities, nine years after the execution of nine people who paid the ultimate price for campaigning for the most basic of human rights: the right for clean air, land and water (see SchNEWS 49). The alternative annual Shell report from FoE states that “The decades of pollution caused by Shell’s rusting network of pipes continue to blight daily life, ruining farmland, poisoning water tables and creating the constant risk of serious fires.” The Christian Aid report also highlights that most of the community development projects presented in various glossy Shell reports are in fact failing.

Hospitals, schools and water supply systems remain unfinished and new roads mainly help boost easy movement of its oil production. But beyond the debate about how much greenwash Shell are spouting, it is clear that the company is determined to prevent the emergence of international mechanisms through which communities could hold it accountable to its pledges. As those multinational investigators Corporate Europe Observatory point out “the company generally gets away easily with its inflated claims concerning its social responsibility record.” As Amnesty International UK Director Kate Allen said “Any attempt to de-rail the Norms, in particular any referral of the Norms... would effectively turn back the clock on years of progress on corporate social responsibility.”

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For not putting a seatbelt on a dog...

Traffic police in Kempten, Germany slapped a fine on a dog for not wearing a seatbelt. Bobbie the dog was traveling in the back of his owner’s car when traffic police pulled the vehicle over.

They handed his owner, a £17 fine which has grown to £29 because he’s refusing to pay it. A police spokesman who defended the fine said: “Small dogs belong on the floor and larger dogs need to be kept in a harness or in the boot”.

OIL RULE THE WORLD

Discoveries of massive oil reserves in West Africa are condemning the region to more greenwashing (which means exploitation and bloodshed) by big oil companies. Angola is currently the only nation in Africa where US oil companies currently dominate. European oil companies such as Shell and BP have traditionally controlled this market. In the late 90s new offshore oil techniques were discovered (Exxon Mobil, has led this exploration). New coastal oil has been discovered in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe which will conveniently be the site of a new US Navy Base. By 2015, it is projected, the US could get 25% of its oil from West Africa.

But it’s a risky and troublesome part of the world, “incompetent repression” means that the oil is out of control. “Piracy resistance” in Nigeria, where local people rise up and sabotage or steal oil, costs big oil companies 100-300,000 barrels of oil a day, and companies say they need military security from the US to operate smoothly. So when the US has finished freeing Iraq from independence... or was it making them independent from freedom ... it looks like they might be moving in to West Africa.

So it’s no surprise the corporations are fighting tooth and nail to avoid mandatory reporting on their activities, because despite all their guff about social responsibility, there only obligation they feel is really important is lining their shareholders pockets. For this they rely on lax environmental regulations in poor desperate countries and making sure the locals don’t kick up a fuss about their activities.

* To read the Christian Aid report www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0401csr

* For more on the Norms www.corporateeurope.org

TRUNK CALL

Is tree planting the new rock'n'roll?

Action has been taken this month against two companies who offer to make their customers' "carbon neutral" - whether that be at work or play. Future Forests and Climate Care claim that any process involving CO2 emissions can be neutralized by planting a certain amount of new trees in forests they manage. Both have had complaints made to the British Advertising Standards Authority over misleading adverts placed in press.

Heidi Bachram of Carbon Trade Watch: "The idea that people can burn fossil fuels and then plant trees to clean up the carbon dioxide that results is simply wrong. This false 'solution' will merely keep people digging up oil instead of trying to shift to clean energy."

This false solution has proved popular; predictably Future Forests' corporate clients include BP and Sainsburys, but their clientele also lists Coldplay, Atomic Kitten and Jamiroquai. Every part of the rock star life style is catered for: long distance flights, CD production, and touring emissions can be neutralised if you pay someone to plant some friendly pollution eating trees in their forest. Maybe Future Forests have a solution to the noise pollution some of these bands emit?

* Glastonbury 2003 was declared "carbon neutral" after an anonymous donor paid for 1,700 trees to be planted by Future Forests. See www.tni.org/ctw-docs/aspress.pdf

CALL THAT A LINE?

Ferhat Kaya a Turkish Human Rights defender and chair of the Kurdish DEHAP party was arrested last Wednesday after a meeting where he was demanding proper compensation for those who were affected by BP's Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. Ferhat has been fighting to have their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights respected. He said he has been humiliated and beaten during his detention, and on Wednesday began a 'death fast' hunger strike to denounce it.

The pipeline will run through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey connecting the Caspian Sea Coast to Turkish Mediterranean, and providing oil and gas for European and US Markets (SchNEWS 433). The project depends on political and financial support from Western Governments and international financial institutions with the World Bank and European Development Bank each approving a £300 million contribution. However the project has yet to demonstrate real development benefits to the peoples in the Caspian region with the World Bank's own advisers have reported that oil industry projects often worsen rather than relieve poverty. Kurdish Human Rights Project 020 7287 2772 www.khrp.org For more about the pipeline www.baku.org.uk

* An Exhibition of Resistance to BP and Big Oil, June 15th-21st. To get involved 07969 786770 www.londonrisingtide.org.uk

Inside SchNEWS

Two West Papuan tribespeople who blocked a road trying to stop illegal logging have been jailed. Please send letters of support to: Matus Nasira and Manase Furima - both at Lembaga Pemasarakatan Manokwari, Jl. Sabang No.4, Manokwari, Papua, Indonesia. For more information about these two and the situation in West Papua check out www.westpapua.net

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SchNEWS in brief

Foreigners aren't welcome in Britain - unless of course they are willing to work in the NHS. The **Royal College of Nursing** have complained that this poaching of nurses from developing countries is tantamount to people trafficking. ** Two of the 'terrorists' who we were told by the cops were going to bomb Old Trafford, were last week invited to a game by the **Manchester United Independent Supporters Trust!** ** There's a public meeting on **ID Cards** next Wednesday (19) at the Old Theatre, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, WC2A 2AE. 1.30pm. If you want to go email: meeting@stand.org.uk www.privacyinternational.org ** 'Anti terrosim laws, Then and Now' meeting Wednesday 26 7pm, Grand Committee Room, House of Commons. Organised by the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities 020 7586 5892 estella24@tiscali.co.uk ** **There's a 'Respect the Unity Coalition' festival** at the Dane John Gardens, Canterbury this Sunday (16) starting at 1pm ** **Historians speak out against fascism.** Tom Lineham - East End for Mosley; Jim Wolfreys - The Politics of Racism in France and Liz Fekete, Institute of Race Relations will be talking next Saturday (22) 1-3pm, Senate House, Malet Street, London. www.LondonSocialistHistorians.org ** **Greenpeace USA** is in the dock next week for the actions of two of its activists who boarded a ship carrying timber illegally exported from Brazil and hung a banner saying "President Bush: Stop Illegal Logging", but rather than prosecute the smug-

Brighton (and Hove actually) Briefs

Busy Saturday in town - ** **Festival of resistance against the corporate takeover of Brighton.** Meet 12 noon at Pavillion Gardens ** There's also a **funeral march to Defence Minister Ivor Caplin's surgery** meet 11.30am North end of George St., Hove. Wear black for a march to Hove Town Hall. At 2pm assemble at Churchill Square to protest against local arms company EDO. 07973 228335 www.safp.org.uk ** Later some of the **SchNEWS crew will be speaking at the Cowley Club**, 12 London Road at 4pm, so come and find out all about Brighton's premier direct action news sheet (ok it's the only one). ** And don't forget Brighton's premier pirates **Radio 4A** on the airwaves this weekend celebrating their **5th birthday party** featuring all kinds of people that

HAW THORN

Brian Haw has been protesting at a continuous picket in Parliament Square against Sanctions and the war on Iraq. Clearly fed up with his presence the police had said that they wanted to remove him, but didn't know what bit of legislation they would use. This followed a landmark High Court ruling which found in favour of Mr Haw and his right to protest.

At just after midnight on Monday police moved in and formed a cordon under the Terrorism Act because of "suspicious" parked car in the vicinity. Police arrested Brian Haw for failing to leave a security cordon and assaulting a police officer, but Brian suffered injuries from handcuffs and was held face down in a police van by four coppers suggesting he was the one assaulted. Just after Brian's arrest the car was (conveniently) identified as just being some tourists who had parked in the wrong place and the security threat disappeared.

The police also decided to rip down all his placards for "safekeeping", this is despite one of Brian's supporters who was luckily in the area at the time saying she would look after them. Later that evening after being released the police dumped all the placards back on the pavement and Brian resumed his protest.

Brian is in court at Bow St Magistrates Ct on 18 May at 10am and would welcome support. Info: emma@drifting.demon.co.uk

glers, the US Justice Department has charged the whole of Greenpeace USA with "conspiracy and illegally boarding the ship" under an obscure, rarely used 1872 law. www.greenpeaceusa.org/trial ** 155 people who were arrested at the **World Trade Organisation protests in Seattle in 1999** (SchNEWS 240) could be entitled to a share of \$250,000 for wrongful arrest. The police had photocopied the arrest warrants from one original which effectively said that one police officer had warned and arrested all 155 people! If you are one of these people contact Allison@hagens-berman.com. A second class action suit for people arrested inside the allegedly unconstitutional "no-protest zone" is still underway and awaiting the result of an appeal. WTOARREST@riseup.net. ** "Why the great surprise over **Abu Ghraib**?" asks Jennifer Harbury, a human rights lawyer whose husband, was tortured for two years and then either dismembered or thrown from a helicopter by Guatemalan military officials who were receiving generous CIA payments. "This has been standard operating procedure for years." www.soaw.org/new/ ** **Mark Thomas** has organized a **Coca Cola - Nazi** advert challenge to highlight the links between the company and the Nazi regime 24th to 30th May, The Nancy Victor Gallery, 36 Charlotte Street, London W1T 2NA, tube: Goodge Street & Tottenham Court Road and 10th to 30th June at The Foundry, 86 Great Eastern Street, London, EC2A 3JL. Tube: Old Street. www.foundry.tv

we have played with them over the last 5 years. 101.4FM web streams <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/radio4a/> ** There's a **Mad Pride Night** happening at the Cowley Club next Thursday (20) 6pm including a showing of the short film 'With Endless Love' about Mad Pride legend Pete Shaughnessy. www.peteshaughnessy.org.uk/ ** The **World Bank** will be recruiting students from **Sussex University** on 17th of May. In 2000, their attempts to recruit were disrupted by people acting in solidarity with those imprisoned for their role in the demonstrations against the World Bank/IMF Summit in Prague Sept 2000. Make sure you get along to their career day for some work experience!

MONSENTO

This week Monsanto announced that it would abandon plans to develop genetically modified wheat anywhere in the world. This is despite investing years and hundreds of millions of dollars into researching and developing wheat to be resistant to its own Round-Up pesticide. Massive consumer resistance to GM crops in Europe and Japan have meant that the Canadian and American farmers growing the crop would have had very little export market making the crop commercially unviable. Monsanto have also announced that they are pulling out of developing GM oil seed rape in Australia and sugar beet in Europe (with Syngenta).

This is yet another massive blow for the GM industry and comes hot on the heels of the Spanish government withdrawing the consent for Syngenta's Bt Corn, the only GM crop being commercially grown in Europe, because of fears that it could lead to anti-biotic resistant super bugs, and Bayer backing out of growing GM crops in Britain (SchNEWS 448). www.biotechimc.org www.geneticsaction.org.uk/testsites/

...and finally...

What does a French policeman do to get an extra bit of income? Prostitute himself! That's what one copper admitted to doing after being arrested after a car chase on the outskirts of Paris, wearing nothing but a pair of fishnets tights!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers... normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. Honest!