



FAT CATS TAX LAX

"We don't pay taxes. Only little people pay taxes." Leona Helmsley, wealthy widow of a New York property tycoon *

SchNEWS reckons it's time to point out the bleedin' obvious – it's always Christmas time for the super-rich and the multinational corporations. Under Neo Labour those with the most cash have doubled their money. A report on inequality from the Office for National Statistics shows that the top 1% increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% in the first six years of the Labour government. The top ten per cent of Britain now owns an incredible 54% of the wealth.

Meanwhile Chief Executive (CEO) pay is out of control. In the UK it rose 25 per cent a year from 1983 to 2002 – no matter how a company was performing. If a CEO remained in post for seven years, he (and it is always a he) could expect to see his salary double – twice. CEOs now pocket around 50 times as much as ordinary employees. In fact, a new paper from business school academics reckon that "corporate managers are somewhat like landed aristocracy in the 19th century, or political elites of the Third World" with their pay far outstripping their contribution to the company or the country.

Office cleaner Abdul Durrant stood up at HSBC annual general meeting in June and asked if cleaners at the bank's Canary Wharf headquarters could be paid more than £5 an hour. It was not, he said, enough to live on. HSBC Bank chief executive William Aldinger didn't answer – and why should he care. He has a £37 million three-year package to live on, as well as free dental and medical treatment for life.

Not that you'll read about this in the corporate media where it's divide and rule. You skint? Then blame those poorer than you. So The Sun runs another 'Shop a Skiver' campaign but forgets to nominate its owner Rupert Murdoch. In 1999 *The Economist* reported that Murdoch had made £1.4 billion in profits over the previous 11 years but had paid no corporation tax. After an examination of what was available of the accounts, it reckoned Murdoch would normally have expected to pay enough tax to "build seven new hospitals, 50 secondary schools or 300 primary schools".

Or what about Richard Desmond, owner of Express Newspapers, who paid himself £46.2m last year. Yet his papers run a relentless campaign against asylum seekers and how they are bleeding the country dry.

Richard Branson's Virgin Group is based in the Caribbean – yet since privatisation, Virgin Trains have received £1.57 billion in

public subsidies. That's taxpayers' money, for someone who pays hardly any tax, for a service that is crap.

TREASURY TAX DODGE

Corporation tax under Labour has now reached an all time low. When corporation tax falls, guess who the burden falls on – yep, the 'little people'. Minutes of an Inland Revenue meeting revealed the agency was going soft on multinational tax returns for fear of driving investment away from the UK. They might be a bit late – a 1997 report by accountant Deloitte and Touche put the figure for legal avoidance alone at a staggering £85 billion a year. That's more than is annually spent on the National Health Service. A leading accountancy expert, Professor Prem Sikka reckons that billions are lost by multinationals basing themselves in tax havens. No one really knows the figures, because the Professor says "the Treasury refused to undertake detailed research to get accurate estimates. It is dodging the issue."

So, what does Chancellor Gordon Brown do? In his last budget speech, he promised to deal with tax cheats, and then announced 40,500 jobs would go at the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise! The Inland Revenue has already faced massive redundancies in the nineties which journalist Nick Davies said had meant government's efforts to catch tax avoiders had "collapsed in a heap of mismanagement and staff cuts." It avoids rubbing the corporations and the super-rich up the wrong way by refusing to release its figures on enforcement.

So while we hear about how the government is trying to crack down on benefit cheats – such as people washing up one night a week in a restaurant for a few extra quid to supplement their crap dole money – they refuse to go after fat cats like Murdoch.

When you hear about another fraud

CORPORATE MADNESS

In legal terms, a Corporation is considered a "person". But what sort of person, we wonder. The World Health Organisation have a checklist they use to determine personality types, called the ICD-10 index. Using this index to reveal the Corporate "person", a clear character-type emerges – that of a psychopath.

Yes folks, the bogeyman your mum told you too worry about when you were young is alive and kicking in company board rooms across the globe. From a callous disregard for others to an inability to feel guilt, the personality of the Corporate Rulers of the World is identical to that of an axe-wielding maniac. And they call *us* trouble makers!

www.thecorporation.com

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

Girl, 10, Cuffed for Scissors in School

Anyone can be a terrorist or murderer these days you know. Even a ten year old school girl. At an elementary school in Philadelphia, a girl was cuffed then taken to a police station. The reason? A pair of scissors were discovered in her school bag, breaking the school's strict no weapons policy. The cops decided as she hadn't threatened anyone with the 8-inch blades she had not committed a crime and let her go but she's still waiting to hear whether she'll be expelled to a special disciplinary school. The girl, reported to have "cried and cried" with "no idea what she did wrong"

hotline or politicians bleating that we can't afford decent pensions, wages, new hospitals, schools, social housing etc., remember it's the business tax dodgers and corporate scroungers that are to blame. Britain is the fourth richest country in the world – the only belt tightening should be round the corporate cowboys' necks!

* Helmsley eventually went to prison for tax evasion!

MATHS WITH JARVIS

Jarvis, the cash strapped corporation that bit off more Private Finance Initiatives than they could chew, can't be allowed to go bankrupt despite debts of £240 million. Who says? The banks that lent them the money in the first place!

The bankers, principally Royal Bank of Scotland and Barclays, are worried that if Jarvis go down the pan, they would be forced to take over many of the firms' projects, including schools, hospitals and road programmes which Jarvis are running under the joke privatisation-by-the-back-door-Initiative.

The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust in north London is one Jarvis PFI hospital project where work recently stopped. They say that the banks are ultimately responsible for ensuring the multi-million-pound facility is completed.

Next month, the Crown Prosecution Service will decide whether to press charges against Network Rail and Jarvis for alleged health and safety breaches following the Potters Bar rail crash** over two years ago, in which seven people died and dozens more were injured.

Looks like they will get away with financial incompetence, will they get away with murder as well?

** Senior executives at Jarvis were given £1 million pound bonuses during the year of the crash

*** Polyp's new book "The Complete if Ordinary People Behaved Like..." is out now, you can order your copy from www.ethicalconsumer.org

DEPORT BLUNKETT

More Christmas cheer for asylum seekers - the Home Office has chosen Manchester, Leeds, Bradford and North London (where there are around 600 asylum seekers facing deportation) to turn unremovable asylum seekers into legal slaves. An unremovable asylum seeker is someone who can't be deported because of circumstances beyond their control such as being stateless, ill or their country is too dangerous to return to. The government thinks these bogus layabouts are having an easy ride here, sponging two thirds of what has been calculated as the minimum needed to live on, and decided that they must do compulsory unpaid community work in return for the generous accommodation and benefits they receive. If they do not obey they will face destitution. Sound humane so far?

Late additions to the legislation allow the home secretary to decide whether performance of community work merits "hard case support" (which mainly consists of otherwise unlettable accommodation). So if you've fled war, rape, torture or just a bit of light starvation, you might be left homeless if you can't clean our streets properly!

Local authorities, trade unions and the voluntary sector are being strongly encouraged by the Home Office to 'express interest' in running these schemes. They will be paid for providing compulsory work (usually a punishment reserved for convicted criminals) for failed asylum seekers. The asylum seekers will not be paid for the work they will be forced to do.

The ever benevolent great leader and his third reich, sorry, third way warriors have also wisely decided to look after the children of failed asylum seekers, presumably because they'll be either at work or homeless. Since December 1st, local authorities have been told to 'take into care' children of failed asylum seekers who do not agree to leave the UK voluntarily. Heartwarming Christmas stuff from that family loving, caring, sharing, Christian values duo, Tony 'blind' Blair and David 'good riddance' Blunkett. www.noii.org.uk

*'You Are Being Lied To About Asylum Seekers' is an excellent leaflet pointing out the truths behind the lies that the media & government feed the public about asylum seekers. If you would like to order copies to distribute contact: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX or email youarebeingliedto@lycos.com

* Yesterday, law lords ruled that locking up foreigners without trial under anti-terror legislation breaks European human rights powers. A Home Office spokeswoman said it was now a matter for parliament to decide whether detention without trial continues.

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4100481.stm

Positive SchNEWS

Tired of slappin' on the nicotine patches every January? Well why not make your New Years resolution to design and build your own eco house? The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) are offering lots of inspiring residential courses. All courses include accommodation and meals at CAT where you can explore Europe's leading eco centre. To check out and book your place on courses like windpower, solar water heating, self build, organic gardening and blacksmithing tel. 01654 705981 courses@cat.org.uk

EDO-NISM

Six anti-arms trade activists were fined £1,500 between them this week at Brighton magistrates. Five more are up on trial in January for the same action at the EDO arms company last may. Smash EDO! are having an xmas noise party at the company gates next Thursday (23rd) at 4pm. Phone 07891 405923 or have a look at www.smashedo.bpec.org

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Inside SchNEWS

Anti-water privatisation activist Matthews Ndlovu has been sentenced to two years in prison or pay a R25000 (£2,300) fine. The Gauteng Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) has appealed for funds to secure his release.

In September 2003, residents of Phiri, Soweto, South Africa supported by the APF, resisted the installation of pre-paid water meters in the township by destroying the infrastructure that had been laid to allow these meters to be installed. During this resistance, a number of activists, including Matthews, were arrested. More and more, Capitalist South Africa is failing to deliver. What were in 1994 considered to be basic rights now need to be "earned". The State call this blackmail "good citizenship" - do what we tell you and all will be fine. In the spirit of the initial optimism of the dawn of the "Rainbow Nation" ten years ago, Matthews and his comrades are openly defying the commodification of life's basics. The State are keen to crush this quickly and quietly so an international show of solidarity, such as coming up with his bail money, would sweat some brows in the South African corridors of power.

Matthews is only £2,300 away from escaping a 2 years in prison, and we in the rich world have a real chance to help. If a dozen squats/social centres/bands do a benefit each, this guy could be walking free. Donation details are on www.sa.indymedia.org

More information on the struggle against privatization and Matthew's progress can be found at www.apf.org.za

GOOD RIDDANCE

Before he resigned (wahey!) David Blunkett finally admitted that the dangerous "armed anarchists" who were searched by police under anti-terror legislation at RAF Fairford, last year were not armed with "cugels and swords" but with a kite.

The idea that peace demonstrators had arrived at a demo tooled-up with cudgels and swords seemed ridiculous to everyone except Blunkett and the police.

Asked how many times stop and search powers were used by police in the vicinity of Fairford during, Blunkett replied that 2,254 stop-searches had been conducted. Asked whether swords were found, Blunkett replied that a range of items had been seized. "Contrary to my understanding at the time, I now understand that these did not include swords". www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/12/302807.html

NANONSENSE

Nanotechnology is the science of building stuff atom by atom. Sounds useful, but like all technology what it gets used for depends on who has the money to fund it. Given the way that every other technological advance gets used for profit and power, it's not surprising that there are already groups protesting against this new technology.

One Nanotech conference has already been disrupted by a group of angels (the taking direct action kind rather than dancing on the head of a pin kind) who presented representatives of nanotech industries with a "Can of Worms" award. Over in France protestors occupied the construction site for the - Minatec Nanotech centre - set to be the largest centre for Nanotechnologies in Europe

Others at ETC group have written an alarming report about how unlabelled nanotech is already finding its way into food. "Down on the Farm: The Impact of Nano-Scale Technologies on Food and Agriculture" Check it out at www.etcgroup.org www.angelsagainstanotech.blogspot.com

SchNEWS is having a couple of weeks off over the festive season and will be back in the New Year with hangovers on 7th January.

SchNEWS in brief

Don't think the London bid for the Olympics is a great idea? There are guided walks on East London's Bow Backs Rivers before the Olympics bulldozers arrive - see the area they plan to build on this Saturday (18th). For other dates and info on the campaign to block the bid www.nolondon2012.org ** Only thousands dead as tanks and bombers bring Christmas joy to town' writes the **Porkbolter**. 100,000 Iraqi's dead since the beginning of the war on Iraq - the same number as the population of Worthing. Read the town's excellent Xmas edition on what an attack on Fallujah would mean to a town in Britain. www.eco-action/porkbolter ** **The Bristolian**, Bristol's fortnightly political scandal sheet, has reached its 100th issue, copies can be found in over 150 outlets in Bristol or by mail order - £10 for 20 issues from The Bristolian, Box 3, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB. ** **London Disarm DSEi** meeting and Christmas drinks 7pm, 20th Dec, details email: meeting@dsei.org ** All adverts promoting jailed former Black Panther **Mumia Abu Jamal** have been banned on Chicago's public transport. A policeman was spotted tearing down an advert for Mumia's book "We Want Freedom: A life in the Black Panther Party" - according to Viacom, who manage the advertising space "the Chicago Transit Authority can no longer accept any more advertisements on this author" www.southernpress.org/books/freedomPR4.shtml ** **The New Squatters' Handbook** is out and is £2 including postage from Advisory Service for Squatters, 2 St Pauls Road, London, N1 2QN. ** **The Little Squatters' Handbook** is a great colour story picture book for kids all about squatting. £4.40, cheques payable to A. Wood, from Little Squatters Handbook, c/o PO Box 2474, London, N8. Profits will go to the Advisory Service for Squatters. ** **The ID Cards Bill** is likely to receive its second reading before Christmas, and the Defy ID Network is encouraging people to get on to the streets around this time to raise awareness of the issues. Sample leaflets can be downloaded from their website, along with ideas for action. There's also a planned day of action on 28th January. www.defy-id.org.uk

...and finally...

You might think that spending \$10 billion a year might get you some results. Not if you're the US military! The first trial of the "Son of Star Wars" missile defence system has failed. The interceptor missile apparently failed to take off due to an "unknown anomaly". The record of the missile defence system is pretty poor - only five out of eight target missiles have been successfully intercepted in previous trials. This recent one had to be postponed four times because of bad weather, and on one occasion had to be stopped because of a radio transmitter failure.

George W Bush had wanted to see the system up and running by the end of this year but he probably won't get to see the system running in his presidency.

SchNEWS reckons that if the system does ever get the go-ahead then the US military will be praying no-one launches a missile at the US in bad weather and has phoned up in advance to make sure all their radio transmitters are working. Then they'll have roughly 50% chance of shooting it down.

Disclaimer

"Never forget the true meaning of Christmas is all about giving" said the Minister for Humbug yesterday. He added: "If you work in the retail sector this means giving up your holiday and, for the rest of you, it means giving as much of your dosh to shops as possible. As for me, I simply don't give a festive fig." (Stolen from this month's Porkbolter).