



WAKE UP! IT'S YA BLOOD, SWEATSHOP & TEARS

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SWEAT NOTHINGS!!!

“My brother works ten hours a day, sometimes from 4am to 10pm. I’ve never known him to have a holiday or time for the kids. For this he gets £45 a month” Andrea, Nicaraguan Charity worker

UK PLC seems to be in a generous mood. Last weekend Bliar and Brown even dedicated a whole G7 summit to African debt relief, promising £27bn a year in aid. Make Poverty History campaigners, meanwhile, were ‘allowed’ to protest from the confines of a fenced-off pen. Outside the meeting, the World Development Movement had an electronic counter ticking away indicating that one child was dying from poverty every four seconds. Debt relief has been tried before and it always comes with the same conditions: privatisation, redundancies and cuts to government spending on health and education.

Nicaragua joined up to the old-style Highly Indebted Countries Initiative and, for a few million dollars, was forced to sell its assets and open the economy to bargain hunting investors. The idea is that by attracting investment the economy will grow, eradicating poverty in the process. But for the multinational corporations the most interesting thing about Nicaragua is its cheap wages. Once again our corporate sponsored politicians are using debt relief as a smoke screen to hide the reality of neoliberalism for the majority of the world’s workers.

Costa Arm And A Leg

Heading into Nicaragua from the Costa Rican tourist resorts, you may be forgiven for thinking that the people are good at speaking foreign languages because the majority of roadside adverts selling sports cars, land deals and financial services are all in English. Scantly clad women meanwhile, flog booze and fags in Spanish. This is an investor’s paradise where if you can’t make it, at least you can get pissed. “Costa Rica is being sold as a playground for rich North Americans” says Pepe, a bar worker from the Playa Coco resort in the North of the country, “none of the businesses here belong to Costa Ricans. We’re all being pushed into the countryside. Gringos practically own the whole coast and we can’t afford to buy anything anymore.”

In a recent publication on poverty reduction, the World Bank said that neoliberalism was the best way to ‘develop’ poor countries. Bank officials argued that people could “move from the vulnerability of grinding rural poverty to better jobs, often in towns or cities”. Leona disagrees. She’s an activist working with sweatshop workers in Nicaragua. There’s no doubt, life

in the countryside is tough, “You’ve got to borrow money from the bank to buy seeds and this means mortgaging the land. But the way things are at the moment, with the droughts and harvest failures, you can’t earn enough money to pay back the loan and the bank takes your land. People say: ‘what’s the point of that?’ and leave the countryside for the city.”

“But we live in a poor city, a really poor city. We consume more than we produce,” says Andrea, a charity worker, “several years ago the city was happy. Now its sad, very sad.” The only ‘formal sector’ work on offer is in the local Maquila, a sweatshop factory on the edge of town. The Maquilas operate in tax-free environments and in Nicaragua are generally owned by US, Taiwanese or Korean clothes companies. The high value stages of making things like jeans such as design and marketing take place in Paris, London and New York. Maquilas are here to contract out the assembly stage. Being able to force women to sew thousands of t-shirts a day is one benefit, but with 70% unemployment, Nicaragua offers an even bigger advantage for the profit hungry men in suits: Low wages. This is the world of ‘just in time manufacturing’. Business is booming and profits are good.

“But the Maquilas are a disaster”, says Leona. And, if workers want out, “you get no compensation, they withhold your wages and you can’t get social security”. So what do they do, asks SchNEWS? “Move to Costa Rica!” replies Andrea. “If you want to leave those infernos, the only option is to emigrate.”

Just before Christmas the Costa Rican border town of Penas Blancas, heaves with Nicaraguans returning to their families after working in the plantations and sweatshops and as domestic servants in Costa Rica. Although the local newspaper says that record numbers are crossing the border, many workers are no longer returning to their families. Juan, a campesino from just over the border in Nicaragua, earns less than 50p a day and has a family of nine to support, “I haven’t seen or heard from my two eldest sons for over ten years.” He suspects they’re too embarrassed to admit they haven’t made their riches down south in Costa Rica. And there are certainly riches to be made! A Maquila worker there can bring home almost £1.40 per hour, that’s over triple the 42p per hour in Nicaragua.

Rebel Waltz

While some are hopeful that the Sandinistas will return to power and things will get better, the revolutionary fighters of

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

Taking the pistol...

Four people were arrested at Kings Cross station while attempting to travel to the European Social Forum demonstration last November. One person was initially arrested for ‘firearms offences’, but was released without charge when it was discovered the item in question was a bottle of eyedrops!

We don’t have any details as to the calibre of the bottle, or the policeman.

the seventies have changed a lot since then. “I was in my 20s when I fought with the Sandinistas” says Miguel, now an NGO worker in Managua. “But now I’m in my 40s. I want a quiet life, more relaxed, without problems. The same is true of the people I fought with, they want an easy life. But the problems in Nicaragua require a radical solution.”

Still at the helm of the Sandinista party, Daniel Ortega, sure enough, is searching for the easy life by striking a deal with the same Catholic Church hierarchy that opposed the revolution he led twenty five years previous. Hoping that the pact will improve his chances in the forthcoming presidential elections he joins the leaders who attacked ‘liberation theology’, the philosophy that influenced many who fought in the revolutionary army. “Although the Sandinistas will be better for the poor” says Leona, “they don’t have a magic wand to resolve all the economic problems in this country. And, in reality, when the elections do come, the Sandinistas may even lose. With Bush against us, I don’t have much hope.”

Papa Bush told reporters in 1989 that Daniel Ortega “was like an unwanted animal at a garden party.” The feeling is still the same. Junior Bush’s henchman Donald Rumsfeld was in the capital, Managua, last November to bolster the corrupt and unpopular Presidency of Enrique Bolaños. But supporting a president with only a 10% showing in the polls comes at a high price. Bolaños agreed to destroy another 300 of Nicaragua’s 1,300 ground-to-air missiles, which had been used to repel a US backed invasion during the 1980s. The White House is making sure that they don’t get in the way should the policy to attack become an option once again.

Read *The Country Under My Skin* by Gioconda Belli Anchor Books: New York

A fashion show benefit by No Sweat for Batay Ouvriye, a Haitian garment workers union, will be held at the London College of Fashion, 20 John Princes St, Oxford Circus on 25th Feb 2.30pm. More info 07845 277865 www.nosweat.org.uk

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: www.nicaraguasc.org.uk

Chemical Love

Valentines Day is this Monday and lurve is in the air (at the prodding of greeting card and chocolate manufacturers and the mammoth-sized flower industry). Well, as always we at SchNEWS are here to spoil it with a barrage of party pooping. And no we didn't get any cards.

Anyway, if you're thinking of saying it with flowers, be careful what it is that you say. Flowers are the most pesticide-intensive crop and flower workers pay a heavy price.

A study published by the Netherlands' Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment reports that Dutch floral workers are exposed to pesticide concentrations of up to 60 times the amount considered safe. The Netherlands, long famous as the global "flower capital," has heavily contaminated water and air in its flower-growing regions. Some European countries are already setting up cooperatives, with growers concerned about pesticide use and workers' health.

Floriculture is big business, bringing in five times as much cash per acre than fruit, never mind organic veg. Consumers demand perfection from cut flowers - nobody wants to send their sweetheart a manky bunch of wilting blooms, but the price of this perfection is high. Flowers are dipped in a noxious brew of chemicals to ensure that they look authentically fresh and natural when they are delivered.

Several years ago, there was a crisis in the U.S. involving the use of a fungicide marketed by DuPont as Benlate. "It was a known carcinogen, widely used in greenhouses," explains Dr Hantworth, "People working with plants sprayed with this substance were getting sick. The flowers were going into people's homes."

In 1996, a U.S. jury awarded US\$4 million to a couple whose child was born without eyes after the mother was sprayed with Benlate while pregnant; however, on appeal, the award was reversed. The case is now awaiting a hearing by the Florida Supreme Court. There have been hundreds of other cases of Benlate poisoning humans and wildlife. Total litigation costs associated with Benlate have so far cost DuPont an estimated US\$1 billion dollars, causing them to withdraw it from the market in 2001.

There are hundreds of pesticides in use, legal and illegal, around the world. The hazards posed by these chemicals most directly affect the people working with them at a production level, but they also screw up the environment, those living in flower-growing areas, and, in all likelihood, anyone who carries home a bouquet in their arms. So if your purchase gets a good reception and he or she is swooning and breathless, it doesn't mean you're onto a winner. Symptoms of Organophosphate or Carbamate Poisoning can include contracted pupils, slow heartbeat, confusion, loss of coordination, sweating, tears, salivating, swooning or coma. Sounds like your average love-struck teen to us.

The health effects of pesticides depend on the type of pesticide. Some, such as the organophosphates and carbamates, affect the nervous system. Others may irritate the skin or eyes. Some pesticides may be carcinogenic. Others may affect the hormone or endocrine system in the body. The *Toxic Trail* website claims there are some 25 million cases of pesticide poisoning a year, mostly in developing countries.

If we've put you off buying imported minging toxic flowers, well, good. But if you still need to affirm your feelings with a purchase, what could you send instead? Well you could try buying locally grown organic flowers. Or herbs to stick in the garden for a year-round supply of tasty green stuff. Or, you **could** just feed 'em some sexy muesli - wild oats are a renowned aphrodisiac (apparently).

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Sporting Zeros

History is not always kind to politicians, not much legacy in unsupported wars and the privatisation of all our public services...no, what's needed is a big feelgood project, one the nation can unite behind with pride. Like the er, Millennium Dome for example... Ok, well what about the Olympics? That Kelly Holmes sure was popular last summer eh? So... London is bidding for the 2012 games. Ok, yes, the unaccountable International Olympic Committee (IOC) have regularly been embroiled in more bribery and corruption stories than a Tory cabinet...and yes, the costs for all recent Olympics have spiralled well beyond all estimates given beforehand (Sydney 2000 costs doubled, Athens 2004 quadrupled - largely paid for by European Union money by the way, support which London is unlikely to get - and Montreal are still paying off the bills from 1976!). Yes, so civil liberties tend to get a little trampled in the name of security, alright the plans do involve Londoners stumping up at least £2bn for the privilege of turning the city into a building site and yes, the plans include the destruction of some natural conservation habitats in favour of

'landscaped parks' and the loss of cycle lanes in East London, but none of these things should hold us back...! Well, we do have some genuine gold medal contenders in the field of spin. London's bid has been put forward with great celebrity razzmatazz but virtually no public consultation, no transparency as to bid spending and vague details as to how all the hidden costs such as transport infrastructure will be paid for. Don't worry though, the Government have got good planners in place - Arup, who did such a good job on London's Millennium Bridge! See www.nolondon2012.org for more info.

Scrap the Olympic Bid Public Meeting this Monday (14) 6.30 pm at Bryant Street Community Centre, off West Ham Lane, Stratford, E14 4RU. Join the critical mass bike ride next Friday (18) 6pm, outside City Hall, on the South Bank, nr Tower Bridge. Saturday (9) Scrap the Olympic Bid March 1pm outside Stratford Station, Meridian Sq, E15.** Before the Olympics bulldozers arrive - see the area they plan to build on. Guided walks on East London's Bow Backs Rivers: 18th Feb and 6 March Meet 10.45 entrance to Greenway, Stratford High Street.

SchNEWS in brief

Don't forget the **Kyoto Climate March** this Sat (12) - various meet up points 0208 8553327 www.campaigncc.org ** Meet to discuss anti-capitalist resistance in the run up to the **G8 Employment Ministers Summit in March** at the Cowley Club, 12 London Rd, Brighton, 6pm Tues (15) www.dissent.org.uk ** Mon (14) **East London Against the Arms Fair** meeting, 7.30pm The Garden Cafe, 7 Cundy Rd, London E16. There's also a **weekly picket of Spearhead** who organise the ExCel Arms fair (DSEI) email picket@dsei.org for details. ** **Hate the G8! Love to Party!** '**St Valentine's Massacre**' party Sat (12) Feb: 7-11 Labour Hall, Lyndhurst Rd, Worthing ** '**The Yes Men**' film about those impressive anti corporate pranksters is showing in the UK throughout Feb. For dates go to www.theyesmen.org/movie ** **Brighton pirate Radio 4A** is on the airwaves again this weekend 101.4 FM - www.radio4a.org.uk around the world ** Sun (13) **London Mayor Ken Livingstone will meet the Chinese ambassador** to slap each others backs in Trafalgar Square, while the Liaoyang 2 are close to death in a Chinese jail where they are incarcerated for daring to organise workers to ask for their unpaid wages. Meet 11am steps of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square to demonstrate 07719 283132 www.nosweat.org.uk ** '**Weatherbombin**' 10 days of music, workshops, artspace, films, etc in S London, 11th - 20th Feb. More info: 07913 518804, www.randomartists.org ** **Demonstrate against Detention and Deportations** outside Harmondsworth and Colnbrook Removal Centres (nr Heathrow) Sat (19) 11.30am - 1.30pm 01235 831568 www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk ** '**Fighting For Justice**' public meeting Sun (20) to highlight the rise of stop and searches, police beatings and racism that has caused resentment amongst the Muslim communities since the advent of the anti-terrorism laws. Lola Jones Hall, Tooting Leisure Centre, Greaves Pl (Off Garratt Lane), London 1-5.30pm www.stoppoliticalterror.com

Waterloo Sunset

Every year over a period of 4 days, 'enthusiasts' gather at Formby nr Liverpool to watch hares being torn to pieces at the Waterloo Cup. The hares are released from their enclosure and chased by two dogs in front of the cheering crowds. Once caught the hare is literally ripped in two in a final tug of war. Nice! This year the event has been moved forward, in advance of the bloodsport ban, for a right bloody send-off. The demonstration against this last (legal) Waterloo Cup will take place on Valentines Day! Meet on The Causeway, Alctar, at 10.00am to move off at 10.30am. Maps and info at www.veggies.org.uk/arc/event.php?ref=27

EDON'T

Brighton's very own weapons dealers EDO thinks that just because they produce bomb releasing mechanisms they should not in anyway be held responsible for the Iraqi bloodbath. Well excuse us for being sceptical but how else are these death torrents propelled over hospitals, schools and mosques without a little helping hand from weapon manufacturers like EDO? It was recently suggested on Indymedia that EDO a) are warmongers, b) are complicit in the deaths of innocent people and c) make things that kill children. EDO are still adamant that they are none of the above. How so? Well, a threatening letter to Indymedia outlines that EDO only 'manufactures weapons interfacing systems and deals only with reputable customers'. Customers like...George W. (for 'Well-thought-of') Bush d'ya mean? Convinced?... If EDO started floggin' biscuit launching devices SchNEWS reckons they would 'fess up to them raining all over the Middle East.

*go to www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2005/02/304915 for more on EDO threatening Indymedia.

*Smash EDO and Brighton Quakers are holding a campaign day this Sat (12) at the Friends Meeting House, Ship Street Brighton - This will include a legal workshop from 1.30pm. As the state tries to crack down on lawful protest anyone who wants to take part in protest against EDO needs to get clued up. All welcome.

*Also this Sat there's a JUMBLE SALE to raise money for the campaign at the Cowley Club, 12 London Rd, Brighton. from about 10-4.

...and finally...

Next time your twiddling yer thumbs on a rainy Sunday you needn't bother being bored 'cos the US general has announced an exciting new pastime. At a recent conference in San Diego, California he decided to share with the public that it is 'Fun to Shoot Some People'. Yep that's right, yet another maniacal cog spiraling out of control behind the Bush regime without the flutter of an eyelid. Lt. Gen. James Mattis, who commanded troops in Iraq and Afghanistan chirped 'it's a hell of a hoot!' but didn't hasten to add that he'd 'be right up front' with the troops if only he could. According to Mattis, popping a bullet into an Afghan's body is a just repayment for the years of female oppression under the Taliban regime. S'pose that means its cool to shoot women and children too then eh? He got a light slap on the wrist for condoning murder, and on Thursday military officials said that he should have chosen his words more carefully but will not be disciplined.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers to cause a stink... Honest!