

WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER TURN TO PAGE THREE...

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LUNATICS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE ASYLUM

As the general election draws near, Neo Labour and the Tories are busy in a race-to-the-bottom, hurtling towards the BNP position on asylum, as refugees become scapegoats for all of our country's problems. If they're not stealing our jobs, they're abusing our health service or taking all the council houses (better be quick, before Labour flog them all). Forget about the rich ripping off the system, it's those bloody foreigners snatching what is rightfully ours from under our noses that are to blame for everything.

But what about the people that come here? How come they haven't got a public voice? What's wrong if people want to come here for a better life? After all isn't that what we do when we emigrate in our thousands to Spain, France or Australia each year?

Wrong Colour

Beto from Angola: After a 2 year legal battle, Beto, a refugee from Angola was finally granted asylum in 1998. Sick from months of torture and neglect in prison he had been desperate to get away from a regime that had imprisoned him twice and had killed his father. Transferred to hospital because of serious illness, he was then smuggled out and across the border into DR Congo and given false travel papers. His application for asylum was posted after he had been sleeping rough, for four days. "For the first month I got about £30 benefits, but in the second month it was cut off - I got food and board in a shared room but I had no money. They said I should have applied at the airport when I got there, but because I had applied late I didn't get benefits. I couldn't do anything, I couldn't get a job. I didn't know the rules because we do not get the BBC in Cabinda." Beto's illness worsened.

He had written to the Home Office several times to check on the progress of his application with no reply so he asked his solicitor to investigate. The Home Office told him they thought Beto had left the country as they had no address for him - unsurprising, as he had no address. Ten months later Beto finally got an answer: he had to return to Angola. "They didn't believe what I had told them, they said there was now a ceasefire in Angola and they told me everything was alright in my country." He took his case to

appeal but was turned down again, this time because he had not registered in DR Congo after slipping across the border and because he had no proof that his life would be in danger if he returned. Proof? He pointed out that if someone wanted to kill you they wouldn't necessarily write to tell you first. Just days before his second appeal was due, hostilities broke out in Angola again and Beto was finally granted leave to stay. If he'd returned to Angola, "I would be dead," he said. Since being granted asylum he's learned English and studied IT. He now helps out at the Refugee Council one-stop centre in Brixton as an interpreter and gives advice to others facing the same situation.

Mohamed Nasri from Afghanistan: Mohamed Nazri's mother sold the family home in Kabul for £5,600 in 2001 and gave every penny to an agent to smuggle her teenage son to England. Her husband, a famous politician, had been imprisoned by the Taliban for supporting a more democratic party and she feared the same fate for him. He made the long journey overland in vans and buses before arriving "somewhere in Europe" where he was sealed with nine others into a hidden compartment in a lorry carrying car engines. After twelve hours in the cramped airless chamber, he remembers he didn't even care if he had made it to the UK. When the doors were finally opened, he just wanted to be able to breathe. "I remember thinking, 'I'm going to die in five minutes inside this lorry.' There was no oxygen left. I was shouting to open the doors and when they did, I was laughing. I didn't care that there was a police officer there, I had another life."

Foreigners

Now working as a liaison officer for a project which links Afghan asylum seekers and Salford NHS, the 22 year old says many people have a similar tale. "I miss my family, I have four brothers and three sisters and I want to go home, but not until I feel free in Afghanistan." He has enrolled in college to study social work from September and hopes to apply for citizenship when his 'leave to remain' visa expires. **Y.K.L from the Ivory Coast:** "The rebels came into our house and took my brother. When my mother tried to protect him they killed her with a knife. They cut her throat and told us to drink her blood. They put knives to our throats and forced us. Then they took my

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brother away. The men threatened to cut my clitoris if I wouldn't stop resisting. Then they raped me. One of them took his belt and started beating me on my face." Y.K.L still has two scars along her cheekbone from the blows. She also has scars on her wrist and down her legs from cigarette burns. Y.K.L was then taken, with other civilians, to the rebels' camp. She was held prisoner for four days in a small makeshift prison where she was frequently raped and watched other women suffer the same violation. One night she and a number of other girls managed to escape.

Be Afraid

"I went straight to my father's police station. When I went inside I found the bodies of the policemen lying on the floor, most of them had no heads. I recognized my father's body by his clothes." She ran away and was trafficked to France to stay with a colleague of her father's, but his family was not prepared to take in an illegal immigrant for more than a couple of days. Y.K.L went to England. She arrived in Dover in November 2002 and asked for asylum.

Her application was rejected but she is unlikely to be deported, Y.K.L is now in limbo because the Ivory Coast is not designated a 'safe country' by the Home Office. Without the right to work or any entitlement to welfare payments, little English and an incomplete education, her condition is desperate.

She is not alone. An estimated 25,000 asylum seekers have exhausted their legal possibilities and are now wandering the streets of Britain's cities trying to survive from day to day.

* 2nd April European Day of Actions for Migrant Rights www.noborder.org/

* Zoe Neirizi is an Iranian refugee who gets refugees to use film to express their experiences www.blackswanfilms.co.uk

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEAK

For being creative

A Detroit artist has been sent down for a month for painting a mural on the side of his studio! Edward Stross, who suffers from Multiple Sclerosis, replicated Michaelangelo's "Creation of Man" on the side of his studio building, to the outrage of the local powers that be. Philistines all! The American Council for Civil Liberties are filing a motion to free the 43 year-old. You can see his mural at www.aclumich.org/attachments/gonzowall.jpg

Patent Nonsense

The name Microsoft is, for most people, synonymous with ideas of monopoly position, corporate bullying and crap bug-ridden software. Over the years, Microsoft has used every avenue of legal leverage their well-paid lawyers can think of to protect their position and snuff out any development that could threaten it. This includes the 'Open Source Movement', in which software developers have been attempting to develop free (improved) alternatives to proprietary software whilst retaining similar functionality and compatibility (SchNEWS can recommend OpenOffice.org for a suite of excellent programs to replace MS Office).

All this has upset companies like Microsoft, because the developers do not have to steal any legally protected copyrighted code to do it but can design their code to achieve the same results – a little like expressing the same basic idea in English but using different words/sentence structure to do it. So, how to stop people thinking that they can write their own programmes and then, even worse, give them away without consumers having to pay big business?

The newest form of attack is patent law. Unlike copyrighting, which protects a specific instance of an idea, patents allows someone to control the idea itself (and for something like 20 years!), suppressing anyone from doing anything derived from the same basic idea. The absurdity of this, especially in a pure-thought based activity like computing, is obvious. If patents had been allowed at the inception of the software industry, some big Microsoft-type company could have come in and said, "er, programmes to manipulate text, some for numbers, pictures, audio, some to sort out data transfer from one computer to another..." and that would've been it – practically no programme could have ever been developed without paying them for the gracious use of 'their' idea. This, however crazy it seems, is now what is, in essence, being proposed. Worse still, for such a crucial piece of legislation affecting creative freedoms of all, and a plethora of small independent developers in Europe and the UK particularly, there was a scandalous recent attempt by the EU Commission to bring it in through the back-door.

In December 2004, the bill was 'attached' to an obscure fisheries bill, as an 'A-list item' to be carried without discussion or vote. It was thankfully spotted at the last moment by an alert Polish eurocrat (Poland has a growing sector of small software houses) and derailed... for a while. The matter was referred back to EU parliament who demanded that the EU commission reconsider the matter; they refused and re-tabled the same directive as an 'A-list' item for a ministers' meeting a couple of weeks ago. Denmark requested a postponement, rejected by current presidency-holder Luxembourg on 'institutional' grounds. The directive now goes back to the parliament where only a majority of MEPs can stop this disastrous bill becoming EU law.

For more, and to find out how to lobby your local MEP, see www.briefhistory.com/footnotes

Brief Briefs

* **Want to get involved in action against the G8? Festival of Dissent** April 6-10th Lanarkshire, Scotland www.dissent.org.uk

* Around 20 citizen weapons-inspectors demonstrated outside **Brighton's EDO arms dealers** on Monday. Over-the-top cops placed a one hour restriction under section 14 of the Public Order Act, demanding that people disperse because they were "intimidating" and might "compel EDO staff to cease work." Three people were nicked and held for 12 hours.

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20 to 1 on the Derby

The Derbyshire cops said it was their biggest police operation since the Miners Strike twenty years ago, and it was their advice following "intelligence reports", that made environment minister Margaret Beckett insist that full security measures be taken.

So, police from as far afield as Brighton and Durham were bussed in to protect 30 environment and development ministers discussing stuff in the lead up to the G8 in Scotland. They met for just two hours before being taken in police convoys to Chatsworth House 10 miles away for dinner! 2,000 police sealed off the area with a five-mile ring of steel fencing and specially laid metal road capable of carrying fully laden riot vans on 24-hour patrol. The operation, costing at least £2m, included the closure of Breadsall village primary school for two days. One SchNEWS reader described the policing as "phenomenal: lines of riot police outside the station at 10am in riot gear including Darth Vader style leg wear." All this for about 100 protestors - which works out at around £20,000-a-head. As one demonstrator said "Seems it would make more sense to simply give us all a few grand to stay away. I'd have stayed away for less than half of what it cost to police me!"

A demonstration march planned by groups including Friends of the Earth was banned by the home secretary, while a Critical Mass bike ride ended with 12 arrests.

So did they get their 'intelligence' wrong? Or was this just a helpful training session and evidence-gathering exercise to help the cops plan for when the G8 meeting proper takes place in July?

* See the pictures at <http://tashcamuk.fotopages.com/?entry=384246>

Big Bad Wolfowitz

Who needs to have experience of banking to run the world's biggest bank? Not Paul Wolfowitz, who, it is rumoured, can barely use a cash-point card. Bush's nomination for the top job at the World Bank is not only worrying because Wolfowitz was a former professor from the National War College, where he developed his concept of "do-able" wars. Nor is it because he can't add up – he said the Iraq war would cost \$30bn, not the likely \$200bn.

Wolfie was introduced to Bush by George Schultz, former Secretary of State to Ronald Reagan, and now director of Betchel, the corporation which charged Bolivian workers, earning an average \$40 a month, half their wages for access to water. Guess who forced a desperately poor Bolivian government to flog its water system to a multinational? You guessed it - The World Bank. With Vice President Dick Cheney's close connections to Halliburton, the main contractor reconstructing Iraq, SchNEWS wonders whether a Wolfowitz-led World Bank will be bunging Halliburton a few backhanders too. After all, it's all mates together and Iraq's sure to want to borrow some money. But maybe all the talk about a 'hawkish' approach is wildly off the mark. After all, Wolfie told the *New York Times* in 2003 that he thought "all foreigners should stop interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq. Those who want to come and help are welcome. Those who come to interfere and destroy are not." Honest. www.worldbankpresident.org

Positive SchNEWS

Banner Theatre is a community theatre company who'll be celebrating their 30th anniversary next month. Banner has produced plays on everything from Private Finance Initiatives to the Miners' Strike and stuff about refugees. 0845 458 1909 www.bannertheatre.co.uk

Be A Darling

This week the government announced the biggest rail deal in Europe, awarding GNER a £1.3bn contract to run the East Coast Mainline for the next ten years. Transport Secretary Alastair Darling was acting as a PR exec for privatization and GNER, saying how wonderful they were and how GNER had made a profit and so were contributing money to the government. But he failed to mention that GNER want to scrap vast swathes of regional services, essential to people in rural areas without cars. These less-used lines also link in with the main lines, so cutting them means less passengers on the main lines. Doh!

In fact GNER is one of the very few train operating companies that makes money from running trains; most companies run at a loss, so the taxpayer foots the bill in subsidies so that the private companies can er, make a profit. £2m a week is paid by the government into the pocket of shareholders. That's right readers, despite crap services and running the lines at a loss, last year profits from rail for National Express were up by 74%, Go Ahead up by 64% and FirstGroup up by 55%.

The biggest winners are the Roscos (Rolling Stock Companies), which are little better than loan sharks. They actually own the trains and carriages and lease them to the train companies at extortionate prices. These companies have made over £2bn in profit since the Tories decided to sell off the railways in 1996. Last year Angel Trains who are owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland made £86.3m and HSBC Rail made £75.3m. These parasitical middlemen lease old trains at extortionate levels which led the chief executive of GNER to comment: "In any other industry, as an asset gets older the people leasing it would pay less."

What our Darling Transport Secretary also failed to mention was that one of the biggest success stories was the publicly owned South Eastern Trains (SET), who since taking over from those jokers Connex in November 2003 have improved punctuality, safety, cleanliness and customer satisfaction - and they've recruited more staff yet need less subsidy than Connex did. Neo-Labour aren't too pleased about this and have pressurized the Strategic Rail Authority, who run SET, not to publicize these successes for fears that it will increase calls to bring the railway system back into public hands even further. In the year before privatization British Rail's Network South East made a surplus of £71m - in 2003-04 the privatized companies needed a subsidy of £360m. The evidence is clearly there that publicly owned rail services are better than privatized ones, so why is the government putting the franchise for SET up for sale to private companies? Perhaps Alastair Darling has an eye on his long term career prospects and thinks he'd like to work for GNER as their PR manager - he's getting enough practice at the moment. Or maybe he's just stupid.

...and finally...

SchNEWS's hot gadget to get – The TV-B-Gone - a palm-sized remote-control device that shuts off nearby TVs! Join 10,000 Jammers in over 275 cities around the world who plan a seven-day rebellion against TV (week of April 25). All you have to do is roam around targeting idiot-boxes in shops, airports, bars, classrooms, etc. and remind people that TV pollutes our mental environment and distracts us from reality. Better still, if you organize a JammerGroup, the makers will even you send you a TV-B-Gone for free! Check details at www.adbusters.org/metaps/psycho/tvturnoff

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SchNEWS warns all readers to switch off yer television sets and go out and do something less boring instead. Honest!