



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER GLOW IN THE DARK...

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LOCAL SCRABBLE PLAYER

ANSWERS THE ENERGY QUESTION:

N₁ U₁ C₃ L₁ E₁ A₁ R₁

"I just suddenly realised it was staring me in the face - the solution is unclear"

Ms Anna Gramm, Worthing

NUCLEAR PHYSICKS

"On the 1 May, me and my parents went to the countryside, to have a nice day together in the sun and gather some dandelions. We walked around, ran in the fields, played, dined on the grass and collected a whole bag of flowers. Happy, tired and covered with dust, we came home. Next evening my father, who worked in the energy sector, came home pale-faced and brought something I've never seen before. He said it was a 'dosimeter' to measure radiation - a word known to me only from political propaganda of the so-called 'peace lessons' in school. He measured the flowers first, and the dosimeter beeped madly. We threw them away, as well as the trainers, clothes we'd been wearing that day. Only at that moment we started to realise what had really happened on 26 April at Chernobyl - the scale of disaster official propaganda was silent about. We hardly knew that it was only the beginning of an endless story, and that we'll remember the year 1986 forever."

Nearly 20 years on, the legacy of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster rarely captures headlines here. But the consequences of the 'peaceful atom' (as it was called in official Soviet propaganda) has, according to estimates, affected more than seven million people. Hundreds of people died from direct exposure to the high doses of radiation; many more continue to die from related diseases.

So what was learnt? Not much it seems. Nuclear is back on the agenda in many of the former Soviet territories still directly suffering from the accident fall-out - below is a roundup of the situation in three of them.

Ukraine

Chernobyl is actually in Ukraine - so you'd think they'd think twice... but, overturning a previous resolution banning new nuclear development, in 1993 the moratorium was cancelled, and nuclear projects were renewed.

Despite environmentalists' protests, the government pressed on, focusing on the unfinished 2nd reactor unit at Khmelnytsky and 4th unit at Rivne nuclear power plants (K2/R4). Ignoring warnings about the danger of continuing with outdated technology, as well as the technical difficulties of 'crossbreeding' Soviet projects with Western ones. The government had only one concern; where to get the cash. Thus Chernobyl became a tool of shameless political bargaining. Western governments and international bodies, which insisted on the closure of Chernobyl, were told it would only be possible after receiving the funds needed for K2/R4. Initially the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) promised to cough up but then changed its mind, perhaps realising that nuclear energy is not the best option - especially in a country where a similar amount of energy could be saved by energy conser-

vation programmes, which are practically non-existent. But the government were determined to complete the works, especially once the head of the state nuclear energy company "Energoatom", Serhiy Tulub, was appointed energy minister!

In spite of public opposition and international concern, K2 was launched in August, and R4 in October 2004. In July 2004 EBRD and Euroatom made an unprecedented decision - to provide Ukraine a loan of \$125m on the security of K2/R4. The loan is over 18 years, with the payments coming ultimately from people's taxes. Unhappily, Ukrainian citizens have already paid for the new units due to a special governmental decree in which energy prices were raised to pay for the construction.

Regardless of the proclaimed 'independence' from Russian oil provided by nuclear power, Ukraine still imports nuclear fuel ... from Russia, and until recently sent back the nuclear waste. To reduce this dependency, two liquid nuclear waste storages were created. In Jan 2005 "Energoatom" announced that work on a new solid waste storage plant will be carried out by US company Holtec International.

The new Ukrainian government thinks seeking US cooperation in the construction of its own nuclear fuel-cell capabilities will finally eliminate the dependence from Russia and allow Ukraine to produce even more energy. Thing is, at present Ukraine has no need to produce more - already much of its energy is exported to Central and Eastern-European neighbours (last year's rise was almost 17%). Nice cosy deal: Europe gets cheap energy, the Ukrainian government some cash, Western companies get contracts. The Ukrainian people have the loans and debts to repay, 15 nuclear power stations, three nuclear waste storages and the prospect of a fully complete nuclear industry in their disaster-ravaged country.

Russia

Some of Russia's old reactors are of the same type as Chernobyl - RBMK - as well as outdated versions of Soviet-constructed VVER. But the disaster never seriously affected the powerful Russian nuclear lobby. Last December the lives of the oldest reactors were extended and the Russian nuclear energy agency, Rosatom, enthusiastically talks of building new nuclear power stations.

Meanwhile in 2001, the Russian parliament, under pressure from the Kremlin and in the face of public opposition, adopted a law allowing the importation of nuclear waste from other countries. Officials painted a picture of huge amounts of cash pouring into Russia's coffers but this didn't happen: frightened by the appalling environmental conditions and

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For having a tantrum...

US cops handcuffed an unruly 5-year-old girl after she played up in class. After being placed in the back of a police car, she was released when her mother turned up and they said they wouldn't bring charges against the child - which was very decent of them, dontcha think?

prospects of technological disaster, no major Western government has dealt with them. The only countries that export waste to Russia are Bulgaria and Ukraine. The former tries to use the cheapest option before getting EU membership with its stricter rules, and the latter is busy trying to build its own storage facilities.

Experts ironically point out that there is actually...(Continued over)

BP MONEY TREE?

As dawn broke over the financial hub of London on Tuesday morning, 8 Rising Tide activists took to the trees in St James' Square, opposite BP Headquarters. A huge banner declaring "BP FUELS CLIMATE CHAOS" was strung up facing into BP's offices, something to ponder on for day-dreaming employees. One activist remains, having spent over 50 hours and counting in a tree. Rising Tide are calling for loud support between 4 and 6, bring pots and pans to give the workers a headache as they leave.

BP's lack of social responsibility is reflected in the massive profits they make and the bloody hands they grease. The company announced profits of £5.5 billion for three months work earlier this year. Investing less than 1% of its capital in renewable energy, BP prefer to prop up thug rule whenever required. Most recently, BPColumbia financed the Columbian military to "protect" its investments, with all the predicably gory consequences.

Like vultures, they insisted on getting at Iraq's oil once the troops had done their bit. They now control data on one of the country's biggest oilfields.

Sam Sutherland, one of the tree-bound protesters, commented, "We're taking this action to draw attention to what is missing from these profit margins: spiralling climate chaos, systematic human rights abuses and untold ecological carnage. With profits of well over \$2 million every HOUR, BP is not making a living - it's making a killing".

As Schnews goes to print (Thursday afternoon), we hear the lone Tree Sitter intends to remain tree-bound at least another night, and would just love some surface-to-air proverbial hurrah-ing. Phone Rising Tide on 07708 794 665 beforehand. Bring Banners n' Biscuits. <http://www.londonrisingtide.org.uk>

HAND'S UP FOR SAVING THE RAINFOREST

The world's rainforests don't only suffer by the chainsaws of big logging companies (although they do of course) – a huge amount of damage is done by poor local farmers struggling to feed their families, who, in desperation (and sometimes encouraged by their governments) clear areas of forest and attempt to farm them. They set light to the vegetation in an attempt to stimulate the not particularly fertile soil to sustain crops – a method known as “slash and burn” farming. This often seems to work for a year or two but the soil becomes less and less productive until crops will no longer grow – the farmers are forced to move on, further and further away from home, clearing more and more of the forests and leaving a trail of barren land behind them. Shame, but what are ya gonna do? Well, one British man, Mike Hands, has been on a mission to do something about it.

Having worked in Honduras in the early 80s and seen the problems at first hand, he came home determined to find out why the burnt land seemed to lose all its fertility over time. After 2 years buried in books and lectures at Cambridge Uni, not getting anywhere fast he went to Costa Rica to talk directly with farmers and finally came up with some ideas. Guessing that the problem was

the inability of ‘burnt’ land to hold on to its nutrients, he spent months testing soil samples before homing in on one factor in particular – phosphorus levels. It seems that this crucial plant-supporting substance was being used up far quicker than the amount planted crops would absorb. In 1988 he incredibly managed to secure some EU funding and began trialling a new system with Honduran farmers, adapted from a technique previously tried in Nigeria, called “alley cropping”. Rows of fast growing Inga trees are cultivated and the crops are planted between the rows. The trees offer shade and protection and, as they drop their leaves, this forms a protective layer of foliage which smothers weed growth and (here comes the highly technical science-y bit) provides the organic material for the renewal of phosphorus levels by little soil microbes. The method is cheap and sustainable, with only a minimal amount of phosphates needed to be added to the land to replace what the crops take – an \$8 sack will support a farm for a whole year.

By the mid-90s it was clear that the tests had worked tremendously well and the farmers were chuffed – it was now possible to continuously

grow better quality crops such as maize without the land turning into a desert. News spread and Brian became aware of thousands of other farmers wanting to join in. With each farmer averagely destroying a hectare of land a year, the potential for cutting deforestation was obviously huge. Typically, at this crucial positive moment the EU withdrew their support and funding dried up. Mike has continued to try and promote the scheme and obtain funding but unfortunately with little success. The scheme has now faltered because there is a lack of seed supplies for the needed Inga trees. Some locals have attempted to set up seed farms from private donations but there is still a chronic shortage – which seems crazy considering the potential benefits which could be reaped from such insignificant levels of investment. Support Mike ‘Green’ Hands – an average joe not content to sit by and shrug his shoulders as the world fucks itself up - and remember this story next time Tony Blair and the G8 are waffling on about climate change and sustainable development. e-mail mikehands@uk2.net

* For a full version of this story check out the February edition of the *Ecologist*

UP AND ATOM

(Continued from front)

...a shortage of storage for the waste produced by Russia's own nuke industry – let alone imports. However, Rosatom carries on with plans to import *more*. The waste from Bulgaria and Ukraine arrives by long-distance railway but, as revealed this year, the security and disaster prevention measures are either unknown to the local authorities, or labelled “top-secret”.

Belarus

Chernobyl is situated 7 km from the Ukrainian-Belarus border and so Belarus was hit hard by the disaster. About 23% of the whole territory has been officially recognised as radioactively contaminated. In 1996 MPs adopted a 10-year moratorium on nuclear power. While the moratorium expires next year, it's unlikely it will be renewed. Belarus' authoritarian president Aleksandr Lukashenka, started to talk about the prospect of a “Belarus nuclear power plant” a couple of years ago, and now this proposal is talked about openly. In early March, Minsk was visited by French company AREVA, to begin talks on modernising the existing industry; but they're also nuclear specialists.

While building nuclear is still met with mixed feelings by officials and citizens alike, politics moves on. This year it has been announced that many of the contaminated areas will be proclaimed ‘clean’. At the same time, compensation will only be given to selected people - those designated “really harmed” by the disaster. While the impact of radioactivity on human health is still unclear, a government paper claims that the *only* indicator of harm is cancer of the thyroid gland. The strategy includes the idea that these ‘clean’ territories should now become economically ‘self-sufficient’, develop private business and compete on the global market. Such a change has been met enthusiastically not only by Belarus officials, but also international institutions: the World Bank agreed to provide money to the isolated regime to help implement the project.

So, the governments of all three affected states have managed to effectively silence or ignore anti-nuclear opposition and plan openly to revive the industry. Talking about political reasons and economic benefits, none of the interested parties managed to explain what they will ultimately do with the waste, how to avoid repeat disasters or cope if the railway is attacked? Eastern and Western nuclear lobbies, politicians and power companies are all looking to gain from the new dawn of nuclear energy in former USSR, but for the citizens it's a no-win situation

Check: www.bankwatch.org & www.antiatom.ru

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Inside SchNEWS

What do you get for standing up for truth and justice in America? Well, you get put in jail obviously - especially if you're black. In the late 80s, whilst we in the UK were laughing at the antics of “The Blues Brothers”, a youngster from Chicago named Aaron Patterson was hauled in by “representatives of the law enforcement community of Chicago” not bothered about things such as “evidence”. A “confession” to a recent murder was extracted under torture and he was swiftly sent to death row by an all-white jury. During 17 years inside, he organised other prisoners to lead a mass campaign to challenge police - and political - corruption which had seen a regime of torture and regular cases of “confessions” being obtained after, some friendly Chinese water torture, suffocation or electrification of testicles. The “Illinois 10” as they were known finally made their point and Aaron was pardoned by the Governor himself in 2003 on the grounds that, er, he was totally innocent. All well and good you might say, give or take the best years of Aaron's life, but this is not where the story ends. Given his experiences,

Patterson unsurprisingly threw himself into more campaigning and activism upon his release. This obviously upset some of the remaining bent and powerful as in 2004 the cops and FBI re-framed / arrested Patterson, on the flimsiest of evidence, for “gun running, smuggling explosives, and dealing drugs” (surprising they didn't blame him for 9-11 too). He now faces life in jail without the possibility of parole – whilst the fine officer responsible for his original interrogation, Lt. John Burge, who tortured Patterson and many other Black civilians, has been living it up down in sunny Florida - that is until Patterson's attorneys summoned him to court in a mass civil rights lawsuit brought by his victims. Friends, family and supporters are trying to raise international awareness of this case and continue to fight for Aaron's freedom, and justice for all in “ill”inois. For current info e-mail JoNina Abron at jonina.1@juno.com and for more background see www.fightbacknews.org/2004/04/aaronpatterson.htm or search <http://chicago.indymedia.org>

SchNEWS in brief

Check out various events happening on MayDay on the SchNEWS party and protest page ** Early Monday morning Glasgow Anti-War Action and Faslane Peace Camp shut the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency based at Beith in Ayrshire. Two gates were locked shut and blockaded and some members of the group entered the site as part of a citizens weapons inspection. They managed to stay locked on till midday when four people were nicked. gawa_glawa@yahoo.co.uk ** Following Mondays High Court hearing of the proposed Edo Injunction (see SchNEWS 492), the Judge will make his decision today, Friday, at the Royal Courts of Justice. Support welcome. Beat the injunction by coming to a demo

Wednesday (4 May) 4pm entrance to wild park, Brighton. www.smashedo.org.uk ** ‘Donate against the G8: Ten Pound Appeal’ The Dissent! Network has begun organising convergence spaces in which resistance can flourish. These will be self-managed zones available in the run up to, and during the Summit, aiming to house and feed many thousands, whilst providing inspiring examples of free, ecological communities. Any funds raised will go directly to financing these spaces, as well as to legal and medical support teams, transport and publicity. So donate £10 - you can even do it online www.tenpounds.org (and don't forget the SchNEWS any-money-please appeal cos we are bloody skint!)

...and finally...

A Canadian judge has ruled that it's ok to break an election promise. Ontario Superior Court Judge Paul Rouleau has absolved Ontario premier Dalton McGinty of breaking an elaborately signed contract that promised not to raise or create new taxes.

The judge said that anyone who believes a campaign promise is naive about the democratic system, and that it is up to voters, not the courts, to punish governments who fib and fabricate.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers...we've gone fission Honest!

Have I Got SchNEWS For You Tour Dates

MAY:

NEWCASTLE (1) Green Fair, Tyneside Social Centre Tent 6pm

GLASGOW (4) 7pm@The Carnival Arts Centre

EDINBURGH (6) venue T.B.C

COVENTRY (9) 7pm Earlston Cottage Pub

READING (13) 7pm International Solidarity Centre, London St.

LEEDS (14)@ The Common Place (TBC)

SHEFFIELD (15) Venue. TBC