



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER SINGLE-SERVING...

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AIR STRIKES

“On Wednesday, August 10th, 2005, Gate Gourmet sacked 800 workers employed at Heathrow. Fellow workers reporting for duty on Thursday 11th August 2005 were faced with the ultimatum of signing a new contract which would slash pay and conditions or face the sack. As catering assistants we are paid just £12,000 a year. As drivers we are paid less than £16,000 per year. These are very low wages by any standards, but especially in one of the most expensive cities in the world. Yet Gate Gourmet is seeking to push them even lower and us even closer to poverty. At the same time, the Gate Gourmet management team awarded themselves hefty pay rises.”
– Open Letter from Gate Gourmet workers

On August 10th Gate Gourmet (GG), the company that provides the 80,000 hot meals eaten on British Airways planes each day, hired 120 temp workers. At the time they were in the middle of a dispute with the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), who represented their 2,000 staff at Heathrow, over a plan to lay-off shop floor workers and slash entitlements. They knew bringing in non-union staff while threatening lay offs would provoke an unofficial walkout. They knew that if workers walked out without a ballot they could be sacked without a settlement. When staff gathered in the canteen to decide what to do they were told they had three minutes to get back to work or they would be sacked. They refused. Soon people were being dragged off the premises by private security GG had hired for the occasion.

The next day 1,000 BA baggage handlers walked out in a wildcat sympathy strike (SchNEWS 508) that grounded all the company's planes and dented their profits to the tune of £40 million.

In case any hearts are bleeding for BA, we should remind you that until 1997 GG were part of the company – sold off during a frenzy of “outsourcing” to cut costs. How does outsourcing cut costs? By passing responsibility for cutting wages, sacking workers, casualising jobs and upping the workload onto subcontractors. Contractors ‘compete’ to see who can impose the shittiest conditions on their workers, who are told to work harder for less or the company who buys their product will go elsewhere, and everyone will be out of a job. Nice. So you’ll be sad to learn that the millions lost by BA in the Gate Gourmet strikes have probably wiped out the savings made from flogging the company in the first place.

In 2002 GG was bought by Texas Pacific, a US venture capitalist firm with a reputation for buying companies cheap when they’re

on the skids, squeezing down costs, and flogging them on for a quick profit. How do you cut costs? By sacking workers, casualising jobs, increasing workload... are you starting to see a theme here? Texas Pacific's biggest problem at Heathrow was a militant workforce with a history of resistance. So they hatched a plan – later leaked to the Daily Mirror – to provoke a wildcat strike. Under UK Plc.'s Thatcherite union laws, workers who walkout without union backing can be sacked – GG could get rid of the uppity union staff and replace them with cheap agency staff, saving £6.5 million a year.

Of course, Texas Pacific aren't only about saving money. By a weird coincidence, the same year they bought GG their boss, David Bonderman, splashed out 10 million dollars to have Robin Williams and the Rolling Stones play his 60th birthday party at the Bellagio casino, Las Vegas. (No airplane food then?)

STATE OF THE UNION

So where does the union movement stand? The UK has the weakest trade unions in Europe after the Thatcherite onslaught of the 80s. Despite eight years of a supposedly Labour government, workers' rights in this country don't even begin to meet the International Labour Organisation's standards. Solidarity is effectively illegal and traditional union structures are hamstrung. An injunction taken out by Gate Gourmet under the Tory union-busting laws effectively makes the TGWU responsible for public order on the pickets on pain of having their funds sequestered. As one union official put it to us: “It's illegal for us to have more than six people on the picket line but it's totally legal for them to lock people in a canteen and tell them they're sacked over a megaphone.”

One sacked GG worker told SchNEWS “The union have done their best but under current law there is nothing they can do.”

After the sackings, GG applied for an injunction against sacked workers picketing the premises, claiming harassment (after allegedly sending infiltrators to the demos to start trouble). A union insider said: “It was ridiculous. 70% of the sacked staff are middle aged women” – not the type known for kicking off. Those incidents formed the basis of evidence for a High Court injunction against 37 named individuals and “persons unknown”, making the TGWU

The Sacked Gate Gourmet Workers Support Group are calling for solidarity with their demonstrations against Gate Gourmet and the Blue Arrow scab labour agency. For times and places check: www.sackedbygategourmet.org.uk

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

If you go down to the woods today...

A man was arrested last Sunday during a picnic in Parliament Square. He was one of a group of people who had the sheer cheek to take tea and play croquet in front of the Mother of Parliaments. He was nicked under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, which has a whole host of measures aimed at stopping protests. The law used specifically in this case, by officers clearly a sandwich short of what they were busting, was that you aren't allowed to protest within 1km of Parliament without permission from the police – maximum penalty up to a year in prison and no cake!

* There's a regular Picnic in Parliament Square to poke fun at the Serious Crime of picnicking; bring food and drink to share (and a book to read in the cells) Noon every Sunday on Parliament Square [green 07854390408 www1.atwiki.com/picnic](http://www1.atwiki.com/picnic)

financially responsible for any public disorder. GG wanted all demonstrations banned from Heathrow, but the judge settled for reducing the size of pickets to six people or less. The union was only given the evidence five minutes before they got into court.

There's nothing unusual in companies using outsourcing and casualisation to isolate workers and boost profits. What's unusual is the way it's blown up in their faces. Secondary picketing, wildcat striking (striking without asking for permission), and sympathy strikes are illegal (because they work). Yet courageously this is exactly what BA's baggage handlers did. Mainstream media claimed they walked out because of family links with the (mainly Asian) GG workers, but a union insider told SchNEWS, “The media misunderstood the nature of community in this dispute. There is a strong Punjabi community based around Hounslow, but there is also the Heathrow community of 60 or 70 thousand people who work in one square mile - people who know everything that happens in the airport. Added to that there is the T&G union which dominates Heathrow and aviation generally. These people saw the attack on the Gate Gourmet workers as pre-meditated assault by a vicious American company on a group of workers with a strong trade union history. It was seen as an attempt to break a trade union. It wasn't just BA workers who went on strike; other workers did whatever they could to help them.”

The fight has spread out of traditional trade union activities and now they are looking to direct action movements for tactics. Our contact said: “We could learn a lot from the corporate campaigning movements. UK Plc needs mobile capital, it needs inward investment. The hire and fire culture is why car factories are being closed

continued overleaf...

CONSULTANTS OF SWING

Since Labour took power in 1997 fees to outside consultants have rocketed by 600%.

The Government claims its extensive use of consultancies ensures "more effective delivery" of policies. A new book from a 20-year veteran of the consultancy business tells a different story. David Craig's *Rip Off* outlines the scams used to generate huge fees at the expense of gullible clients.

Take the NHS, which is busy spending an estimated £30 billion on its IT programme. Tony Blair was sold the idea by McKinsey management consultants, led by David Bennett - who it just so happens has now been appointed Blair's policy chief for an undisclosed "six-figure salary".

The NHS computer system was supposed to list everyone in the country, ailments included, so doctors could treat them "on screen". Nobody ever asked for this database, which was due in 2004. Since then the cost has soared and now stands at £6.2 billion, with no known delivery date - all money that could have gone on silly things like new hospitals, doctors and nurses (SchNEWS 481).

So how do they get away with it? As Craig says, "What you tend to find with major technology projects is they start with a huge fanfare and with the consultants promising all kinds of financial and operational benefits once the great system is up and running. However, months or even years later, as the whole thing grinds excruciatingly to a halt with money and people's time apparently disappearing into a huge black hole, clients soon don't care about the benefits anymore. They drop their expectations to the minimum and are just relieved when the basic parts of their system are finally working.

"In my experience, very few consultancy cock-ups ever see the light of publicity. After all, any management consultancy project is normally a joint effort between the consultants and the organisation's top management who decide to hire them. If the whole thing goes belly up, there are not many management teams who want the world to know that they have made a dreadful and expensive mess. Therefore consultancy screw-ups are typically swept quickly and efficiently under the carpet and life goes on. Management consultancies know this and exploit it."

And of course the other silver lining to this parasitic cloud is that if it really comes on top, the leaders of business and government who agreed (over a lavish lunch, no doubt) to spend so much cash paying other people to make their decisions for them can use the old "it wasn't me - they screwed it up" excuse. No need to resign, just bring in some new consultants to clean up the mess! All future responsibility washed away. It's win-win!

And it's a popular game too. Last year 40% of the World Bank's aid budget went to consultants. Organisations in Britain spend over £8 billion p.a. on consultants. But as Craig asks, "Why are many of the huge multinationals, major hospitals and government departments apparently unable to find the skills they need amongst their many hundreds of thousands of employees?"

* David Craig 'Rip-Off: the scandalous inside story of the management consulting money machine' (Original Book Company)

* Monitor, who regulated NHS foundation trusts (SchNEWS 404) has spent £10 million with McKinsey consultants - more than half its budget, in its first 15 months. £64,500 of this is going to Chelsea Clinton, the 23 year old former US president's daughter, who works for the firm. Of course with her Oxford University degree in international relations she is no doubt an expert in privatising our health service.

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ANIMAL CRACKERS

Following the closure of Newchurch Farm (see SchNEWS 509) animal rights activists have been identified by senior police officers as the "single biggest threat to UK Plc".

Of course damaging corporate profits is the greatest crime of all in PFI Britain. Right now the movement seems to have the state on the back foot. Britain's reputation as a safe haven for animal abuse and "Life Sciences" has taken a battering, leaving the government seriously rattled. New laws have recently come into effect and a new multi-million pound attempt to destroy the movement has been announced. But activists remain defiant, one telling SchNEWS "They say this every time we're successful - It's a sign of their desperation".

New initiatives to target the animal rights movement are nothing new. From the Schwarzenegger approach of ARNI (Animal Rights National Index) to NPOIU (National Public Order Intelligence Unit) to NETCU (National Extremism Tactical Co-ordinating Unit (What a gobfull!)), repression by acronym has been a constant feature of activist life.

What's different this time is that laws brought in under the one-law-does-it-all Serious Organised Crime Act specifically make certain activities around "animal research" activities illegal. It is now a criminal offence, punishable by up to five years in jail, to try and get someone to break a contract with a vivisection establishment. If you commit an act that is either now a criminal offence

PEDALLING HATE

Last Friday New York cops arrested 48 cyclists taking part in the monthly Critical Mass bike ride, arresting them for "parading without a permit". This brings the total arrests to 566 in one year.

Critical Mass began thirteen years ago in San Francisco and has since gone worldwide, usually taking place on the last Friday of every month. It is an "organized coincidence" where cyclists get together and take over the roads with the message "We're not blocking traffic. We are traffic." In New York this had been going on for years till last August when 264 cyclists were arrested on the Critical Mass that came a few days before the start of the Republican National Convention. Since then the rides have continued with harassment from NY cops. www.worldcarfree.net/nyc

* Unofficial Critical Mass Webpage - www.critical-mass.org

AIR STRIKES *continued...*

down here and not in Germany. Britain attracts investors because of its low wages and the government doesn't want that atmosphere disturbed. We need to let them know that if you're going to put a cost on to us, we're going to put a cost on to you. Closing down Britain's main entry hub cost them a lot. So let's hunt down the agencies and the investors - Let's go through this whole capitalist food chain and find out whose grubby fingers are in which pies."

Similarities with repression of other movements have also not gone unnoticed: "In the way that the Government used to trial public order tactics in Northern Ireland before bringing them here, now things are trialled on extremist groups who maybe don't have massive public support, they then enter the mainstream and are used in labour disputes."

The GG workers are demanding that all 670 who were sacked last week be reinstated, but GG is still insisting that 200 "militants" amongst the group will not be taken back. A group set up to support the sacked workers has begun to target Blue Arrow, the temp agency that supplies scab labour, and they urgently need support. To get involved or to donate funds check out www.sackedbygategourmet.org.uk

or a "tortious act" - one that causes someone economic damage (which used to be a civil matter like trespass or libel) you can get nicked. Yet another classic Neo-Labour blurring of civil and criminal law to protect those with deep pockets and guilty secrets.

The first arrests under these laws were made in Hounslow last week. Seven people were bailed after demonstrations at delivery companies, which transport animals for research.

Even the allegedly left-wing press dutifully repeated the mantra that the animal rights movement is an isolated minority. "These people are thugs, pure and simple. Forget about having a debate with animal rights activists" according to the *Independent*. In an effort to justify this crackdown they happily parrot the line that the AR movement is a "conspiracy of about 40 hardliners" - who between them somehow manage to run four major campaigns and take direct action every night of the week across the world Presumably one of the side effects of a vegan diet is the ability to teleport!

In fact the movement consists of thousands and is going from strength to strength and state attempts to destroy it have unleashed a spectacular wave of underground actions.

What they're really concerned about is if the more successful tactics catch on...

*SHAC (Huntingdon Life Sciences) www.shac.net *SPEAK (Stop Oxford Primate Lab) www.speakcampaigns.org.uk

*GATEWAY TO HELL (Vivisection transport) www.gatewaytohell.net

* Bicycle Film Festival this weekend @ the Cochrane Theatre, Southampton Row, Holborn, London 020 7269 1606 www.bicyclefilmfestival.com

* Still We Ride, the film about the crackdown on NY Critical Mass last August is showing in Brighton. 7.30pm, 22nd Sept, Fringe Basement, 24 Kensington St. www.stillweridethemovie.com

* World Car Free Day is 22nd Sept, events all round the world: www.worldcarfree.net/wcfd/

* Sleepwalking into Disaster: Are We in a State of Denial About Climate Change? Discussion in the Holywell Music Rooms, Oxford led by George Monbiot and George Marshall. 7-9pm, 22nd Sep, 01865 727911, www.COINet.org.uk

...and finally...

"The sky's going to fall on our heads" so said Chicken Licken yesterday. The latest ludicrous scare story to have us running around like headless chickens is avian bird flu.

Nevertheless the Government is getting into a flap over a potential outbreak. It is worried that the avian flu that is endemic in chickens in Asia might spread to Britain and that if the virus mutates it could spread more easily amongst humans - currently only those handling birds have been affected.

This has ruffled the feathers of pigeon hater Ken Livingstone who has ordered 100,000 anti-viral tablets to protect him and his staff at the London Assembly. Bird brained officials at the Department of Health have also drawn up a plan to preserve the pecking order. Anti-viral tablets will be available for those at the top of the dung heap who want to chicken out: top of the list are key government ministers, health workers, police, armed forces and workers at the BBC who would be expected to keep everyone informed and show re-runs of Birds of a Feather to keep everyone calm. SchNEWS suspects fowl play.

Of course the rest of us turkeys will have to wait and hope that there isn't an epidemic until March 2007 when there will be enough anti-viral tablets in stock.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers... Choking the chicken could lead to gaining influenza with the rest of the flock. Honest!