



WAKE UP! IT'S YER VIVE LA RESISTANCE...

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DELTA FORCE

KEN SARO-WIWA REMEMBERED AS OIL CONFLICT CONTINUES

“The announcement of an oil discovery in any territory is comparable to the declaration of war against the territory. Oil destroys the environment, contaminates water and air, and it also contaminates the social structure, destroys forests, destroys life and livelihoods and holds nothing sacred.” - Nnimmo Bassey, chair of Oilwatch Africa.

November 10th will be the tenth anniversary of the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni tribesmen. They were framed and executed by the Nigerian military government for campaigning against the devastation of their homeland by oil giants Shell-BP (see SchNEWS 49, 282, 453). Behind the scenes, Shell-BP were running the whole grisly show. They orchestrated and financed the campaign of terror, slaughter and human and ecological exploitation that ended Saro-Wiwa's life and thousands of others.

Of course corporations like Shell always hold their hands up when asked and say “it's nothing to do with us.” Saro Wiwa's son Ken sees things differently, “As far as I am concerned, they encouraged the military Internal Security Task Force to violate the human rights of the people. All that was done was to enable oil production to resume...OK, they didn't tie the noose around my father's neck, but without Shell's intervention and encouragement of the military government it would never have happened.”

Ogoniland is in the eastern part of the Niger Delta. Half a million Ogoni tribespeople live there. Shell-BP, operating under the protection of the ex-colonial power Great Britain, found oil there in 1956 and have robbed £100 billion of black gold from the region. The Ogoni got nothing but the utter ruin of their lands and livelihoods. The money was split between the corrupt Nigerian elite and the corrupt Corporate elite. The Ogoni continue to live in abject poverty, with many villages lacking clean water, electricity, schools or basic health care.

Saro-Wiwa became a leader and spokesman for the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, MOSOP. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and was a world-famous poet, teacher and writer. In one statement he said that, “The results of such unchecked environmental pollution and degradation include the complete destruction of the ecosystem... All one sees and feels around is death. Environmental degradation has been a lethal weapon in the war against the indigenous Ogoni people.” MOSOP

tried to stop the ecological destruction that Shell was wreaking and to secure a greater (or any) share of the oil wealth that was being drilled from under their land. In 1993, 300,000 Ogoni united to protest against their lands being destroyed by Shell's relentless thirst for oil. By mass direct action MOSOP shut down Shell's extraction facilities. They have never been reopened. Next year there was a violent backlash from the Nigerian military. 2,000 Ogoni were killed, some 30,000 made homeless, countless others tortured and raped. Shell claim that they are unconnected to this repression, but have confessed to paying the military twice for going to specific villages where they terrorised and killed Ogonis.

OXY-MORON

Despite the cessation of drilling, Ogoni land is still criss-crossed with leaky pipelines and flow stations. Toxic flares and spills are commonplace. Shell avoid responsibility and make little effort to repair damage. In corporate nu-speak these outrages are known as ‘externalities’ because its someone else's job to sort it out. Shell top bod, Lord Oxborough reckons, “the locals appreciate the flares as a heat source to dry their fish.” Every cloud has a silver lining in corporate responsibility world!

Lieutenant Colonel Okuntimo, the leader of the notorious ‘Internal Security’ force that occupied Ogoniland said, in a classified memo, “Shell operations are still impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence.” The Ogoni people's oppression comes from their countrymen, the product of post-colonial ethnic divisions and cultural clashes. But like any smart colonialist, Shell have been hovering over the carnage, playing divide and rule, arming, paying and egging on the killers, in order to make staggering profits. A leaked report written by Shell consultants WAC in December 2003 stated that Shell was part of the problem, and that the way the company operates “creates, feeds into, or exacerbates conflict”.

In 1996, Shell splashed out £20 million on PR, hoping to greenwash their way out of the stink that had risen all around them. They began producing reports on how much they have spent on community resources in the Delta, but in truth, the compensation for ruined lands and lives has been rare and token.

A new Amnesty International report has revealed that the people of Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta continue to face death

and devastation at the hands of security forces. In particular, those who protest the actions of Chevron, Shell or their subcontractors, getting in the way of profits, risk collective punishment by the ‘security’ goons they employ.

One vigilante group, employed by a subcontractor of Shell Nigeria, killed 12 people in a dispute over an oil contract. In response, in Feb 2005 the army went in to the town of Odioma and killed at least 17 people, raped 2 women and razed 80 per cent of the homes there. They claimed to be looking for the gang of criminals that Shell had armed and employed.

CRACKS IN THE SHELL

Resistance continues. Cutting into Shell's production by 10,000 barrels per day, hundreds of angry Nigerian villagers have shut down an oil-pump and pipeline. The protesters are demanding compensation for a 2003 oil spill and fire that damaged more than 500 hectares on the Niger Delta. In another part of Nigeria, the Ijaw people are threatening to blockade plants and dismantle pipelines if they are not compensated for a 1998 oil spill. Meanwhile, two cases in U.S. courts are putting Chevron on the spot for attacking Delta villages in retaliation for protests.

Why all the aggro? The Niger Delta is the world's tenth largest producer of oil, but this perhaps understates its strategic importance. Its reserves (estimated at 35 billion barrels) are largely composed of the ‘light’, ‘sweet’ crude highly prized by the West. The gas-guzzling US of A currently imports 10% of its domestic oil supply from the Nigerian Delta and wants to up that to 15%. The Delta is only three weeks shipping time from the US as compared to eight from Saudi Arabia.

And Uncle Sam isn't taking any chances of the flow being cut off. US naval ships are a regular presence in the Gulf and military aid to the Nigerian government increases. Plans are afoot to construct a ‘forward operative location’ on the island of Sao Tomé, strategically situated in the middle of the Gulf of Guinea. This ex-Portuguese colony, which suffered all the usual imperialist ravages now looks set to become like Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, a base for projection of US power into the region. A useful remedy for uppity locals. The UK has got its grubby mitts in there as well: spending £400,000 on a military training centre for training ‘peace-keepers’ - Nothing to do with securing supplies of energy in the face of the dwindling supply of North Sea Oil then?

* See: www.remembersarowiwa.com and www.corporatewatch.org/?lid=302

* Recommended reading: **The Next Gulf** by Andy Rowell, James Marriott & Lorne Stockman (published by Constable)

DON'T TRADE FOR FREE, ARGENTINA!

White House Inc. paid a visit this week to the seaside resort of Mar Del Plata in Argentina with Bush and his corporate pals intent on bullying their southern neighbours into joining a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). To their disappointment the proposal proved not so popular when 40,000 demonstrators protested against the pursuit of corporate profit the FTAA will surely bring. 2,000 security staff, 8,000 riot police, hundreds of corporate cronies and 4 AWACS surveillance spy planes failed to deter the organisers of the counter-meeting, the 'Summit of the People', which began on the Monday. The People's Summit called for an immediate end to the FTAA talks, action to combat rising inequality, and called on Latin Americans to "energetically reject the militarisation of the continent promoted by the empire of the north." Things started to go badly wrong before the FTAA Summit even started when 70 Argentine police suffered food poisoning after eating a dodgy lasagne at their hotel.

On the Friday afternoon, masked rebels tossed firebombs and rocks at riot cops protecting the conference. Banks and corporate stores were smashed and set on fire, and businesses were looted for material used as street barricades, which were set aflame. Police fired tear gas and arrested 87 people. Banks and shops were also attacked in the capital, Buenos Aires, and the cities of Rosario Neuquen, and Mendoza.

Bush's plan was all about extending the North American Free Trade Agreement to the rest of the continent so that North American consumers, and their rich Latin American counterparts, can continue to buy \$2 T-Shirts and \$10 microwaves

at their local Wal-Mart, whilst those Latin Americans who are lucky enough to have jobs work away in abysmal and repressive anti-union sweatshops. The summit ended on Saturday in deadlock: Mexico, the US and 29 other nations pushed to set an April deadline for more talks on free trade, but the move was opposed by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela. Off message Cuba, of course, was not even invited to express an opinion.

And the future doesn't look too promising for Corporate America, as Bolivia is poised to join the anti-free trade bloc if, as seems likely, the indigenous leader of the Coca growers, Evo Morales, wins the next election. He recently kicked off a rally by calling for popular resistance to the 'Fascist George Bush' and promises an end to the reign of neo-liberal economics that have ravaged Bolivia. He was among 40,000 other activists, including chat show host/volleyball legend Diego 'hand of God' Maradona, on the 'Alba express' - a train which took anti-FTAA protesters from across the Americas to the summit.

Alba is the Spanish acronym for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, a development program based on co-operation, mutual aid and anti-imperialism which is fast gaining currency in the shanty towns of most major Latin American cities. The question that lies ahead is whether this programme will be hijacked for political gain by opportunistic left wing leaders or whether it will genuinely bolster the fortunes of the 96 million Latin Americans who continue to live on less than 50p a day.

For more info on the protests check out Indymedia Argentina: www.argentina.indymedia.org

FRENCH FRIED

France has ignited with direct action, which also spread to Berlin and Brussels (Do we just have better TV over here or something?). With two weeks of rioting by the dispossessed youth, and the effective imposition of martial law, this is the situation as the French Anarchist group Alternative Libertaire sees it:

"People in working class neighbourhoods live in constant fear, both for themselves and for their children. They are afraid of humiliating identity checks, arbitrary arrests, unpunished police violence, and spurious convictions for "outrage and rebellion," all in order to meet some police quota. Even recent official reports have called attention to this increasing lawlessness on the part of the police.

We support the rebellion against injustice, the sense of mass solidarity, the elements of political awareness amongst most young people. As such, we understand and are in solidarity with both the necessity and the reasons behind the direct action now taking place throughout the working class areas.

This week of riots expresses the hopelessness of the most marginalised section of a generation with no future. Yet it should also be seen as being connected to the government's strategy of tension and current repression of social movements... All of these struggles bear witness to the same social insecurity.

We are not going to demand a return to "community policing" or building new sports centres so that young people can work out their frustrations in silence. Does anyone seriously believe that this will solve the social tension caused by the political and social violence of those in power?

There are certain to be more explosions of anger unless there is a redistribution of work and wealth, all the more certainly so if social regression, inequality, racism and marginalisation continue unchecked. 'Prevention', religious recuperation and repression will all be useless. Only justice and social and economic equality can solve things."

* www.alternativelibertaire.org (in French)

...and finally...

Buy Nothing Day on 26th November, is a day where people abandon the creed of commercialism and enjoy all things free. The self proclaimed festival of frugal living and culture-jammers jamboree. It's a day where you challenge yourself, your family and friends to switch off from shopping and tune into life. Celebrated as a holiday by some, a street party by others - anyone can take part provided they spend a day without spending. Why not help spread the message and do something to awaken some of the zombie consumer herds? Set up credit card cut-ups, don white coats and vaccinate against affluenza, give out free samples of nothing - anything to show that the best things in life are free. Check www.buynothingday.co.uk or just nick stuff.

If you're near Manchester, why not get involved with some of the upcoming anti-over consumption events. Starting with a workshop day on November 26th, with discussions and tips on the art of subvertising, events continue throughout December. For details see www.dosummat.org.uk

Freaked out 'cos the tinsel's going up already? Breaking out in a cold sweat at the thought of the slushy trudge to the concrete consumerist eyesore that is your local consumerist temple? Can you smell the fear of the seasonal shopper as the clock ticks towards Christmas Eve and they still haven't quite found what they're looking for? Don't Panic 'cos radical tightwad splinter group www.buynothingchristmas.org are planning a cheapskate festive season. 'I'm not mean- just ethical'.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - black gold makes white man crazy... Honest!

FAMILY FORTUNES

There will have been some first-time activists this week when Councillors, teachers and pupils from two Wigan schools formed part of a demo against the forcible removal from the UK of Sarah Hata and her children - Dennis, Hope, Maureen, Peace and Moris - all deported to Uganda on 26th October. The protesters demanded that the Hata family are returned to their home in Wigan and their solicitor enabled to make representations on their behalf.

As one campaigner explained, "Peace Kasonko is in the same class as my ten year old. My daughter and her friends are devastated by Peace's 'disappearance'. As Chair of Governors at the school that these children attend, I can perhaps voice the distress and confusion that staff and children are experiencing over this family's removal from our midst."

Sarah and the children were taken from Yarl's Wood Removal Centre just hours after being seen by her doctor, who said, "the family show signs of post traumatic stress disorder and are not fit to be removed from the UK", as well as confirming that "Sarah Hata has scars of torture", suffered when she was imprisoned, tortured and raped before escaping to Britain in 2002.

The entire family integrated very successfully into the community in Wigan and made many friends. The community are appalled by the way this popular family were treated in detention and sustained injury during removal attempts. Another success for multi-cultural, Cool Britannia. *See: www.asylumsupport.info

Positive SchNEWS

Gay Bishop anyone? No not a new real ale, but a radical monthly newsletter in Reading. A collective of activists who want to become the media, they are on the lookout for stories, writers, web-geeks, donations and details of events for their 'what's happening' section. Sounds familiar! Email readinggaybishop@yahoo.co.uk or write to Gay Bishop, c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 3JE. Get reading in Reading!

SchNEWS in brief

The 14 day trial of **Pitstop Plowshares** (See SchNEWS 489) has collapsed... because it has come to light that the judge attended the inauguration of Bush and could therefore be seen to be (just ever so slightly!) biased. Truth really is stanger than fiction. See www.warontrial.com for more. ** 400 organisations from across the US are to launch a major offensive against hated supermarket chain **Wal-Mart**. Coordinated by **Wal-MartWatch**, the event is dubbed Higher Expectations Week, and will run from 13th to 19th November 2005. www.walmartwatch.com ** 23rd November, **Palestine and Media Bias** - talk by Tim Llewellyn Ex BBC Middle East Correspondent. 7.30pm, The Auditorium, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton. Organised by Brighton and Hove Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

COMING OUT OF THEIR SHELL

Activists from **County Mayo** are touring the UK during November to increase awareness of the struggle to prevent a giant **Shell Consortium** (See SchNEWS 506) from building a dangerous, raw gas pipeline and huge refinery on unstable bog land, raising serious public health and safety issues and devastating remote conservation areas on the coast of Ireland. www.corribos.com. Dates:

* **London**, Saturday 12th November, 7pm to 3am, RampArts social center (www.ramparts.co.nr) Benefit gig, food, drink & music.

* **Newcastle**, Monday 14th November, 7.30pm, Tyneside Irish Centre, hosted by Why Don't You?

* **London**, Thursday Nov 17th 7.30pm, London Action Resource Centre (www.londonarc.org) hosted by London Rising Tide.

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