

WAKE UP!! WAKE UP!! IT'S YER BOOT UP THE SYSTEM...

# SchNEWS

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# SILI-CON JOB

SchNEWS HACKS INTO THE DARK SIDE OF HI-TECH CONSUMERISM

Is there such a thing as a 'fair trade' computer or iPod? International attention has been focussed on the appalling labour conditions required to produce our clothes and many brands now boast their 'fair-trade' credentials. But the same scrutiny doesn't apply to the many other types of manufactured goods which are coming out of similarly dire sweatshops in east Asia.

Microsoft recently released its new 'operating system', Vista. It will only run on the latest computers, prompting millions of people to upgrade. This cycle of forced obsolescence caused by 'new generations' of technology is the engine that drives the consumer electronics industry. Environmentally the cost is huge with large scale mineral extraction using toxic and resource-heavy processes during production - for products which are on average used for three years before becoming 'e-waste', filling holes in the ground with lead, cadmium, copper, gold, chromium, tin, zinc, antimony, coltan, plastics and more. The West then ships some 50 million tonnes of 'e-waste' to dump in China each year.

## UN-PC

The next time you ogle over an iPod, think about who's dainty little hands have put it together: Apple builds them in a mega factory in southern China which employs 200,000 people, crammed 100 at a time into dormitories, eating factory-provided food, for £25 a month. Most workers do over 60 hours a week, including hefty 'voluntary' overtime. The iPod plant, in Longhua, Shenzhen, is run by Taiwanese company Hon Hai, the world's biggest contract manufacturer (annual turnover- \$30 billion) working for companies including Hewlett-Packard, Nokia and Sony.

Shenzhen has become a city of 12 million, mostly made up of peasant economic migrants. 90% work illegally, which means they don't get any health care, education or social security. Chinese workers are not represented by trade unions and factories clamp down on worker solidarity, sacking 'agitators'.

Workers can be on their feet amidst excessive noise for over 11 hours a day, handling dangerous chemicals, petroleum products, paints and solvents and breathing in metal dust and soldering smoke. They suffer from ailments ranging from rashes to breathing difficulties, bone and spine problems, eye, ear and hand damage. There is no health & safety, little in the way of protective clothing, masks etc. and jobs are grindingly repetitive - in a keyboard factory a worker will put six keys into a keyboard 300 times an hour for

over fifty hours a week. With the pressure to perform, workers are punished, humiliated or fined for production errors. If the workers don't go at it hard enough they are threatened with globalisation's main weapon - the factory will simply move somewhere cheaper, leaving a trail of displaced and unemployed workers behind them.

## ROTTEN APPLE

The production of the silicon chips used in all computery stuff is extremely resource intensive. While silicon itself is very abundant, it is extracted in destructive sand mining around the world, and the refinement process requires heating to 1900 degrees, then treating with nitric, sulphuric and hydrofluoric acids and arsenic. And it's thirsty work: a UN study found that the production of a complete computer and monitor takes 240kg of fossil fuels, 22kg of chemicals, 1,500 litres of water - and that's before packaging and long distance distribution.

China has been hit with the environmental costs of such large scale manufacturing. In November 2005, a chemical accident in Jilin, north east China, saw 100 tonnes of benzene and nitrobenzene spill into the Songhua River, causing an 50 mile carcinogenic slick to flow down the river. Millions were left without drinking water for days with a deadly legacy for generations to come. Meanwhile BASF (the largest chemical company in the world and inheritors of Nazi collaborators IG Farben) has opened a \$2.9 billion plant in Jiangsu to produce 600,000 tonnes of ethylene for plastic production annually as well as 1.1 million tonnes of other chemicals, in a country where acid rain falls on 30% of the country, and 70% of its lakes and rivers are polluted.

While the whole computer industry is a million miles from ethical sustainability, some firms are worse than others. Smug Apple Mac users may have to 'Think Different' after a recent Greenpeace report placed Apple amongst the worst manufacturers for their environmental policies, using hazardous substances abandoned by others and strictly keeping to the regulatory minimums.

Dell might have recently committed to a full 'take back' recycling scheme, and offers to plant a guilt-cleansing tree for customers paying an extra \$2 (How PC!), but these petty gestures of mild corporate green one-up-man-ship do not compute. Hundreds of millions of computers have been chucked out

## CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

### For squatting...

An eighteen year-old German was nicked earlier this month for making the wrong sort of a deposit in front of a cash machine in the southern German town of Eggmuhl (pretty much how it smelt according to nose-witnesses).

Out to prove it's defecation that you need, he had apparently dumped his load by the hole in the wall eight times and was only caught when CCTV was installed to film him in action (now presumably a smash hit on [www.pooinpublicfetish.com](http://www.pooinpublicfetish.com))

Whether or not he was making some kind of protest at the shitty world of banking remained less clear than his bowels and he now faces charges of 'vandalism'.

over the last few years - the vast majority of which would have still been in working order - and around 90% of them have gone straight into landfill. A not insignificant three billion consumer electronic units are expected to become obsolete by 2010.

**What do you do about it?** If you have a computer - and even the anarcho-primitivists we know do - then the best advice from SchNEWS is... Direct Inaction. Do nothing. Don't upgrade, if it 'aint broke don't fix it and if it is - get it repaired. Windows XP will be updated for several years, and as we said in SchNEWS 560, free 'Open Source' software - headed by the operating system of Linux, Open Office, Firefox and others - offers free, direct equivalents for the software Microsoft's monopoly rides on. And they are slowly gaining ascendancy across the world, particularly in Latin America, Asia and some European countries. As Open Source improves and becomes more common, and M\$ anti-piracy software increases, pretty soon it will be the only viable option.

So think about that when yer next sitting with your laptop in a groovy right-on wi-fi cafe sipping a fair trade mochaccino listening to mp3s...

\* For advice about Linux see [www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/howtolinux.htm](http://www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/howtolinux.htm)

\* If you are chucking an old PC, donate it to a charity instead of landfilling it. \*\* Aid Convoy regularly do humanitarian trips to the Ukraine taking computers for schools, as well as other aid to Kosovo and Albania, see [www.aidconvoy.net](http://www.aidconvoy.net) \*\* In Bristol a group is taking computers, digital cameras and other IT gear to Palestine for community use, see [www.bristolcomputers4palestine.co.uk](http://www.bristolcomputers4palestine.co.uk)

\* Read the CAFOD report on working conditions in electronics factories at [www.cafod.org.uk/policy\\_and\\_analysis/public\\_policy\\_papers/private\\_sector](http://www.cafod.org.uk/policy_and_analysis/public_policy_papers/private_sector)

**INFORMATION FOR ACTION**

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Published in Brighton since 1994

## Banana Smoothies

Time for a nice ripe reminder of how capitalism works. Global banana merchant Chiquita's long history of supporting paramilitary forces was confirmed earlier this week as the company agreed to pay a £15m out of court settlement to the Colombian government. It admitted that company bosses had bunged over £1m to the right-wing 'United Self Defence Forces' (AUC) since 1997 – well anything to keep those ripe profits flowing. Never mind that the AUC militia are heavily involved in the cocaine trade and responsible for some of the worst civilian massacres the country has seen. Despite this, the firm were not forced to reveal too much about their role in smuggling 3,000 assault rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition as part of their 'community outreach programme'.

And just what shade of shady people you pay to keep business booming doesn't matter: Chiquita had been paying the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) between 1989 and 1997! All this is topped, of course, by their dodgy past under the previous brand name of United Fruit – especially their involvement in a CIA-backed coup that overthrew a democratic government in Guatemala in 1954.

But cheap fruit must continue flowing to our supermarkets, so whilst outraged Colombians were calling to extradite the US-based company executives responsible, Chiquita was busy portraying itself as a victim of Colombian violence. A bunch of Wall Street analysts quickly declared the matter closed, and made reassuring noises which led to a juicy rise in share prices. Sweet.

\* Unpeel some history by reading *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* by Stephen Schlesinger (Anchor Books, 1990).

## 3-IN-1 OIL

The Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline agreement has now been signed by the governments of Russia, Bulgaria and Greece. Last month Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania signed a similar agreement for the construction of the Burgas-Vlora pipeline. Both pipelines are supposed to solve the 'Bosphorus problem'. The problem being that those pesky environmental laws are getting in the way of rampant profiteering. Turkish authorities limit the amount of crude oil that can be loaded on tankers to protect the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits from oil spills. The new shiny pipeline solves this 'problem' because a few leaks from a damaged pipes is a lot less of an issue – at least to company bosses.

Women of the Idheze community in the Niger Delta beg to differ. They have again shut down oil facilities of the Nigeria Agip Oil Company alleging failure to pay compensation for damages caused by chemical waste fluid the firm flushed into the their community. Back in December last year the women occupied facilities following Agip's failure to implement an agreement about entrances into their land.

It's now 18 years since the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and the company has still not paid the damages it owes to the victims of one of the biggest environmental disasters ever to occur (See SchNEWS 205). The disaster destroyed livelihoods and decimated wildlife in Alaska. Instead of coughing up, Exxon Mobil has dragged thousands through years of litigation by appealing every guilty verdict it's been given since 1994!

\* There'll be an **Expose Exxon Day** with 24 hours of protest outside the company's (Esso) HQ. From 5pm on Thursday 5 April through Good Friday there will be demonstrations with a climate victim's vigil, a mass action on Friday followed by a Fat Cats Party. See [www.campaignccc.org](http://www.campaignccc.org) for more info.

## 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY DANE LAW

Following two days of rioting in Copenhagen, 800 people have now been nicked. Since the Ungdomshuset social centre eviction (and demolition) earlier this month (see SchNEWS 579), 5,000 have been involved in demonstrations. The 'final' tally of arrests remains unknown and a considerable number of those nicked were young kids. Nor does anyone know how many foreigners have been deported or refused entry to Denmark. 230 people were kept in prison for at least 10 days. Of the 35 arrested inside the house, 21 have been released (mainly foreigners and some Danes), with the remaining 14 remanded for another four weeks.

After the raid, cops took all those arrested in Ungdomshuset into the basement, handcuffed them and removed their gas masks before closing the doors and shooting tear-gas into the enclosed space. As a result, one person nearly died and was rushed to hospital. In addition Danish TV2 reported that during the riots the police had been shooting tear-gas grenades intended to penetrate doors and walls into crowds and at individuals on the streets. The gas, Ferret-40, is stronger than normal tear-gas; luckily no-one was killed.

All those arrested have been charged under the notorious 'Para 134a' – a law that presumes you're guilty if you've been in an area where there are mass disturbances (see [www.blackcross.dk/134a-en.pdf](http://www.blackcross.dk/134a-en.pdf)). The first cases are ready to be heard in a court without trial by jury. Instead the hearing is presided over by one judge and two lay judges, who have to be members of Danish political parties

(we're not making this up). There is no legal aid for defendants if they lose their case. And whilst the state pays the lawyer's fees, the defendants have to repay the state every month – if they miss a payment the state can then take 15% of their monthly wage. Social democracy? No thanks!

Actions and protests continue on a daily basis, not just in Denmark but all over the world. There are too many to mention – see [www.modkraft.dk](http://www.modkraft.dk), [www.indymedia.dk](http://www.indymedia.dk), [www.emoware.org/ungdomshuset.asp](http://www.emoware.org/ungdomshuset.asp) and *Bundskruen*, a magazine in English and Danish available from [bundskruen@gmail.com](mailto:bundskruen@gmail.com).

If you're in Copenhagen, visit Folkets Hus in Folkets Park, Stengade 50, Norrebro for info (open 3-10pm everyday). Demos to support the remaining prisoners go from Blagardsplads, Norrebro to Vestre prison every Thursday at 5pm. Large demo this Saturday 31 March in support of Christiania and Ungdomshuset leaving from Carl Madsen Plads, 2pm. In addition, the 1 May demo in Copenhagen is planned to be very big and lively.

The Danish Anarchist Black Cross urgently need donations to help support the remaining prisoners. Prisoners would also like to receive letters and cards. Contact [www.blackcross.dk](http://www.blackcross.dk) to find out how.

Warning: As a foreigner in Denmark be careful on demonstrations as the police are quick to arrest and deport any they suspect of being involved or potentially involved in political activities. Use your common sense on crossing the border into Denmark – try not to go in large groups and dress smartly.

## Party & Protest

**31 – 5 April** is a week of **legal chicken liberation**, with Brighton Animal Action. They are saving 13,500 chickens from the slaughter house, and need your help - crates and pet carriers to take the hens away, transport and some holding barns in the midlands or the north where they travel to their new lives. Contact [info@brightonanimalaction.org](mailto:info@brightonanimalaction.org) tel 07779 128239. [www.brightonanimalaction.org](http://www.brightonanimalaction.org)

**APRIL 1st - Manor Garden Allotments** are holding a Spring Party, the day before the official eviction date. These allotments have provided food for more than 150 families for nearly 100 years, being a focus for the diverse community in East London, but are to be turned into a footpath for the 2012 Olympics. (See SchNEWS 574) There will be music, food, digging, Easter eggs and more. Call 07956890825 web [www.lifeisland.org](http://www.lifeisland.org)

**12th - Grand National Demonstration at Aintree** (part of Horse Racing Awareness Week 7-14 April). 12 noon opposite the main entrance to the Racecourse on the A59 (by railway station entrance). For more see: [www.veggies.org.uk/event.php?ref=995](http://www.veggies.org.uk/event.php?ref=995)

## SKANSKA RAPPED

Local residents locked the gates and hung banners at the Skanska yard in Sutton, near Mansfield on Monday. Protesters were registering their disgust at Skanska for their role in widening the M1 to four lanes in each direction between the M25 and Luton (See SchNEWS 575). Skanska will be joined by fellow tree-huggers Balfour Beatty after winning a £289m Joint Venture contract. Chief Executive of Skanska, David Fison, used to be the Managing Director of Balfour Beatty's rail and civil engineering businesses. Jobs for the boys an' all that.

The usual spiel about combating congestion offered by the official version, hides a cash wielding exercise in lining the pockets of two companies renowned for 'winning' Private Finance Initiative contracts, while laying the environment to waste. £300m nicker would be better spent on public transport. Better still would be if we binned the commute and shopped and worked (or not) locally. For more on the campaign see: [www.nowideningm1.org.uk](http://www.nowideningm1.org.uk)

### Reclaim the Future 4

All day event on March 31st in a self-organised space in London. Practical workshops, cafe, political cinema, stalls, infoshop and art. Proceeds to anti-war and anti-capitalist action. 1pm - very late, £5, for more call 07756 163405 or 07758 119655. For more see [www.rts.gn.apc.org/diary.htm](http://www.rts.gn.apc.org/diary.htm)

### ...and finally...

Need to purge bad debt? In the Ukraine, one heating company has hit on a hard leftfield solution. A red bill is rapidly followed up by the Red Tsar. The company has terrified thousands of punters into coughing up with the image of Comrade Stalin.

Posters of the Soviet dictator were put up around the city of Donetsk with the words: "Comrades! This not the cinema, this is real life. Anyone who does not pay their heating bill will be punished." Bosses from the state-owned Donetsk Heating Company said: "It was the nearest we could get to intimidating people without sending round the heavy mob, and it has worked." Deputy-director Alexandra Semchenko added: "Most people associate Stalin with order and discipline. This campaign will force them to think about the consequences of being behind in their Five Year repayments plans."

SchNEWS wonders how long before British Gas start dusting off pictures of Maggie...

### MEET PC AND MAC



### Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers to upgrade your mind not your gadgets...Honest!

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