



IF YOU'RE NOT SWISS-ED OFF

AS THOUSANDS CONGREGATE IN GENEVA TO RESIST WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION MEETING

Ten years on from the 'Seattle Battle', about 5,000 people marched through Geneva for the Anti-WTO protest on the 28th November - and were met with tear gas, grenades and water cannon as they tried to disrupt the latest WTO Ministerial meeting, aimed at 'reviving' world trade. This was part of a week of events, workshops, and demos involving a convergence of farmers, fishermen, unionists, and anarchists group from across Europe.

Since Seattle shook the pants of the corporate world (See SchNEWS 239, 240), the WTO hasn't expanded - a victory of sorts - but it hasn't shown any sign of disbanding yet. The number of people suffering extreme poverty has surged ahead since the organisation was set up and two-thirds of developing countries now import more food than they export.

But what has changed since Seattle is the fact that populations and governments in the 'developing world' have woken up to the sham of neo-liberalism, and are no longer the push-over the West would like. The Doha Round talks (See SchNEWS 332) are still in deadlock eight years on with countries more prepared to hold-out against US-led proposals.

And why should they agree to plans designed to open up 'immature' developing economies to ex-

plotation by global corporations, cutting tariffs and subsidies to ensure that the resultant 'level playing field' tilts heavily in western economies' favour?

Doha was not even on the official agenda for the Geneva meeting, but was being pushed as an economy boosting measure off the record.

Protesters descended for their own Geneva Convention, dressed-up to mock the shirts attending the conference. A black bloc threw fire bombs at police and damaged a dozen shopfront businesses, including a bank at Place Bel-Air, a jewellery shop and a hotel on the Quai des Bergues. A number of cars were burned, and three buses and numerous other cars were damaged. Thirty-three were arrested. There were no injuries to police or protesters, although a little 80-year-old lady was pushed over in a melee.

* See <http://www.anti-omc2009.org/?lang=en>

* The climate caravan is leaving Geneva after the WTO protests to arrive in Copenhagen On December 9th for the COP15 Climate Conference - see www.climatecaravan.org

* **This was all just a warm up for next week's Copenhagen biggie** - for a rundown of events see SchNEWS 700, www.klimaforum09.org, www.globalclimatecampaign.org, www.climate-justice-action.org, www.climatecamp.org.uk

DOW AND OUT IN BHOPAL

"It took some time, but we managed this quickly, and we can say that we are providing 100% clean water [in Bhopal]. There was nothing hazardous for human lives there." - Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on the 25th anniversary of the world's worst industrial disaster at Bhopal.

Nothing Tony Blair has ever said about the Iraq invasion could come close to this level of outright bullshit, and no climate-change denier or flat earth society proponent could speak so much in the face of reality or scientific evidence.

On December 3rd 1984, the Union Carbide plant at Bhopal leaked 27 tonnes of highly toxic methyl isocyanate gas - used to manufacture the pesticide Sevin - killing some 8-10,000 within three days, leading to a current death toll of 23,000, and some 150,000 are left with chronic conditions, such as neurological, organ and chromosomal damage; tuberculosis, cancer and other diseases. One in 25 babies born in the area have congenital defects.

As the site was never cleaned up, the toxins have seeped into the water system, and now analyses have shown that the soil has at least 16 contaminants at levels greatly exceeding WHO levels, including Carbon Tetrachloride toxicity at more than 2400 times the 'safe' level - which has actually risen by 270% in the past year as the chemicals leech further into the soil. The toxins in the ground water are known carcinogens and neurotoxins, particularly harmful to children and the unborn.

It's been left to the independently run, inter-

nationally funded Sambhavna Clinic - set up in 1996 - to treat the victims, which sees 150 people every day for conditions such as liver disease, anaemia and all manner of organ damage. The clinic constantly sees new victims - those born with defects, 25 years later.

There has been a week of events in Bhopal to commemorate the disaster, including continual vigils and processions. In London on Wednesday a choir gathered at Trafalgar Square, as well as numerous other demos across the world.

The Bhopal Medical Appeal and Amnesty are on tour in a bus, travelling through seven countries from Sweden down to Italy, stopping off at Dow Chemicals plants and raising awareness. The bus will tour this country next year - see <http://bhopalbus.com>

The other side to this whole sordid story is the efforts that Union Carbide - and its now parent company, Dow Chemicals - as well as the US Government and Chamber Of Commerce, have gone to avoid any comeback from Bhopal. Read about this in the full version of this article on the web - see www.schnews.org.uk/archive/news7022.php

* See also SchNEWS 238, 580, 637

* For info about the UK-based International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal see <http://bhopal.net>, for more about the Medical Appeal see <http://bhopal.org>

* To read the BMA water report see <http://water.bhopal.org>

WHEN CHIPS WERE DOWN

A Welsh Climate Camp faction turned their attention to Port Talbot this week and targeted a biomass power plant in Margam. The only one of it's kind in the UK (although more are planned for the local area), the plant takes hourly deliveries of 20 tonnes of woodchip during working hours to keep the fires burning.

Activists locked on using bicycle locks to close off the plant's entrance and stop the deliveries, while others climbed the chimney and unfurled a banner reading 'Clean Energy: Dirty Joke'. The demo lasted three to four hours before a squad of police officers removed the campaigners, took their details and searched the group and their vehicles.

With Port Talbot air pollution levels already exceeding EC limits, another biomass plant in Holyhead is planned which will be the largest in the world. The two stations will require an area of managed forest plantations half the size of Wales to feed them, land that could be used to feed a third of Britain.

* See <http://climatecampcymru.org/?p=932>

UNI-LATERAL DECISION

Students at Sussex Uni took to direct action yesterday (3rd), protesting against staff cuts. Following on from last week (See SchNEWS 701), a large demo was held outside the building on the Falmer campus where a management meeting was taking place to vote for the cuts. But then students set off the fire alarm and a group stormed into the building and tried to force their way into the meeting, having a rowdy synchronised stomp and banging on the walls. Soon around seven police cars arrived on the scene, and the crowd dispersed, without arrests. As far as we know, the meeting went ahead and presumably the cuts were waved through.

Said a student spokesperson, "students and staff are here to show them that we won't allow a decision without consultation. The proposals have been made without any real consultation with staff or students. They involve massive cuts to student support services, and involve cuts to over 115 jobs and over 70 fixed terms contracts."

Inside SchNEWS

Mindaugus Lenartavicius, a 22 year old Lithuanian national was sentenced this week to two years for his part in the G20 demos (see SchNEWS 671). His crime? Trying to set fire to some window-blinds inside the Royal Bank of Scotland. Even the prosecution had to admit that his efforts resulted in nothing more than singed blinds and "scorching" to the ceiling. He had been cleared at an earlier hearing of arson "being reckless as to whether life was endangered". Although he wasn't nicked there and then, and despite being balaclava-clad at the time, cops were able to identify him later by his distinctive 'studded hood'. An address to send letters of support to Mindaugus will be published when we find out where he's gone.

* **Elijah Smith** (one of the EDO Decommissioners - see SchNEWS 663) was moved to Lewes prison yesterday. You can write to him: VP 7551, HMP Lewes, 1 Brighton Rd, Lewes, BN7 1EA

DUBAI NOW, PAY LATER

So the jewel in the capitalist crown has finally fallen off this week as Dubai World, the emirates holding company responsible for conjuring up much of the desert city asked as nicely as they could for a six month debt holiday from their creditors.

Described as a dream location where 'expansion has no limit', Dubai was built on cheap immigrant labour (with obligatory absence of worker rights, squalid housing and a high rate of worker injuries and deaths) - all financed with borrowed money from the big global investment players. The creditor list includes plenty of UK interest with all the credit crunch villains involved, including RBS, Lloyds, HSBC and Standard Chartered PLC. In all British banks have a tidy £30bn 'invested' in Dubai.

In a state with rapidly dwindling oil reserves and few natural resources, the idea was to stay afloat with income from property, trade and tourism to hold face with super-wealthy oil rich neighbours like Saudi Arabia and Oman. Well, you've got to keep up with the Al-Jones' haven't you?

They wasted no time with buying up international property stocks - Dubai World owns many famous locations in the UK (a corner of Trafalgar Square, 10 Whitehall Place and the Metropole building to name just a few) and in the rest of world. But with debt now spiralling into the region of 80 billion dollars (although no one knows the true figures) development projects in Dubai have ground to a halt, with cranes standing idle as everybody scratches their heads wondering what to do next.

The reality is that Dubai is not the only economy based on sand, speculation and other people's money. Countries that bought wholesale into the consumerist dream such as Iceland, Ireland, Greece and Ukraine are now facing sovereign debt that they have little chance of repaying, and the UK isn't far behind. Dubai has become the financial crisis in a microcosm, demonstrating that even the most over inflated bubbles can burst when an economy based on debt and denial faces the fact that if the money isn't really there, spending it anyway eventually leaves you in a hole heap of trouble - yes, even if you have wisely spent it on creating landscaped islands in the shape of a map of the world.

DE-TENSION CENTRE

On 28th November, activists and supporters arrived at Campfield Immigration Detention Centre in Kidlington to continue the campaign to close the prison and end immigration detention as the Centre reached its shameful 16th anniversary.

Throughout its history detainees have campaigned tirelessly for release with letters, rooftop protests, and hunger strikes - and their efforts have been matched by activity on the outside. Every last Saturday of the month activists meet to protest and demonstrate their solidarity with those on the inside.

This time, No Borders, Barbed Wire Britain, Campaign To Close Campfield and the odd MP made speeches about the work they are doing outside the prison and an impassioned speech was also made by a migrant who saw his friends kidnapped by the authorities. The most moving images of the day remain the hands waving at the windows from inside the Centre, an indication that the demo meant something at least to those imprisoned inside. All are urged to join the monthly demos against the cruelty of racist policies and institutions like Campfield.

* See www.closecampfield.org.uk and www.barbedwirebritain.org



SchNEWS in Brief

* The Mainshill protest camp kept up its active reputation by blockading the site for seven hours on Monday night to prevent tree felling, and did it all again on Tuesday to halt further works. For more see <http://coalactionscotland.noflag.org.uk>

* This Saturday (5th) is **The Wave** - a big day of action and march against climate change, in the run-up to COP15 at Copenhagen. **London:** organised by the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, meeting 12pm at Grosvenor Square going to Parliament at 3pm, then onto LSE at 4.30pm. <http://the-wave.org.uk> **Glasgow:** organised by Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, assemble at Bellahouston Park, 10.30am marching to Kelvingrove Park. www.stopclimatechaos.org/thewavescotland

* **NOTT A CHANCE** - After being outnumbered by antifascists at recent demos in Wales and Scotland, the Islamophobic English Defence League are turning out this Saturday (5th) in Nottingham. The EDL are meeting at 2pm at Wetherspoons, marching to Nottingham Castle. Also during the afternoon is a returned soldiers' march. The UAF and Stop The War are marching, but again, don't let their stewards control the demonstration. Meet 10am at Market Square. See www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/nottinghamshire

* **PARTY & PROTEST** - for a full listings of events see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

RAISING THE BARCLAYS

'Target Barclays' actions took place across the country last Saturday (28th), called for by Smash EDO (see SchNEWS 701). The day of action drew attention to the bank's involvement with EDO MBM/ITT, the Brighton-based weapons parts manufacturer.

A host of autonomous groups staged their own demos at Barclays in locations across the country. In Hastings, Tunbridge Wells and Falmouth, campaigners leafleted and picketed their local branches causing sleepy town police to come out to protect the 'defenceless' multinational.

Brighton activists demonstrated at their local branch, handing in a letter to the manager, and inspiring some customers to promise to close their accounts after reading their flyers. Wrexham joined in the party, making use of Barclays new £1 million shop front by stringing up banners.

SchNEWS' top prize goes to Cambridge activists for scaling a huge building opposite Barclay's, currently conveniently covered in scaffolding, and cutting seven foot high letters in the plastic surround, telling people for miles around that Barclays invests £7 billion in the arms trade.

The campaign against Barclays and EDO MBM/ITT continues with regular noise demos in Brighton and more action planned for the future, including the Remember Gaza mass demo in Brighton on January 18th. For more see www.smashedo.org.uk

* A recent investigation of EDO's export licences has found that they have owned UK patents for equipment used by the Israeli military since 1998, and have been actively seeking Israeli patents since 2003.

DALE FARM ALERT

Dale Farm, the largest Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller community of its kind in Britain (See SchNEWS 694), home to over 100 families (1,000+ people) is now under serious threat of eviction.

The site on Oak Lane in Crays Hill, Essex - which began in the 1970s has, like all other sites, been under threat since the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act which repealed the Caravan Sites Act 1968, obligating local authorities to provide space for travellers. The population of Dale Farm has swelled as other travellers were evicted from sites around the country.

Part of the site was bought around this time by the Sheridan clan of travellers but planning permission to live on the land has been repeatedly refused by Basildon Council. According to the Commission for Racial Equality this is typical - 90% of planning applications from traveller communities are routinely refused compared with a 20% average failure rate. Stretched up by the council, the residents of Dale Farm have recently also lost their final appeal to be heard by the House Of Lords.

The council are now pressing ahead with a £5 million plan to evict and bulldoze the site. On 10th December, Basildon Council leader Tony Ball will formally lead his cabinet in voting to give a £2m contract for the eviction of Dale Farm - and this contract will most likely go to ruthless 'gypsy eviction specialists' Constant & Co (See SchNEWS 669). If that happens Dale Farm will soon be given just 28 days notice before the bailiffs arrive, and residents face having to prepare to resist the eviction imminently - and will need urgent support.

* Rally to 'Save Dale Farm' - meeting outside The Basildon Centre, St Martin's Squ-are, Basildon SS14 1DL from 7pm on 10th December, aptly also on Human Rights Day. Email dale.farm@btinternet.com to receive further updates.

...and finally...

Nottingham city council is as cash strapped as most are - and currently has a £30m hole in its finances as it struggles to maintain its failing public services. Given the current political climate, it's perhaps beyond droll to note that the incumbent council leader is call Kay Cutts.

But this hasn't stopped them from spunking over £80,000 on an internal smut hunt, paying outside contractors to use their 'intelligent software' to trawl council computers looking for 'inappropriate' material.

Well just porn actually, racist and other extremist material slips through the net. The software must use some complicated set of algorithms to identify things like a predominance of skin-coloured pixels within images, characteristic grunting-shaped soundwaves in videos or likely word combinations of porn-sounding file names, and determines an estimated level of obscenity. How accurate this process is unknown - presumably some perv relishes the job of testing the results.

But apparently Notts is festering in filth - 2,700 images were labelled as those "which may cause distress or psychological harm to an unexpected viewer" and only 12% of the PCs have yet been checked. Next up are individual councillors computers, who must now be cold sweating in anticipation. Whether spending up to three quarters of a million quid to check 'em all and prove once and for all what a bunch of wankers work for council goes down well with the electorate - or merely gives them the hump, as their bin collections get cut, remains to be seen.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS suggests that the Advisory Service For Squatters set up an office in Dubai. Rich pickings. Honest.

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