



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER GIVE 'EM THE CHOP...

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HONG KONG PHOOEY

WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE CIRCUS HITS HONG KONG

"The rhetoric of the WTO may be free trade, but its key agreements promote corporate monopoly." - Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South

As another World Trade Organisation (WTO) shindig begins next week in Hong Kong, where the fat-cats of the world will promise once again to eradicate poverty, it can't be long before we are all living in their neoliberal utopia. Armed with their new 'Doha Development agenda' we can look forward to fairer trade and an altogether more caring, compassionate and cuddlier kind of capitalism for the new millennium. Or have we heard all this bullshit before?

The argument goes that trade is the best way out of poverty. This is how it worked for us, after all (if you leave aside the 500 year history of slavery and imperialism, of course). We even offer the poorest nations loans to help them onto their feet. Oh, except that the loans come with strings and are nothing more than the thin end of a new colonial wedge. The poorest of the poor are forced to sell what public-owned infrastructure they have to Western corporates who then jack up the price and bleed them dry.

Western economists stress that countries will prosper by using their 'comparative advantage' in world trade. In other words, each country is encouraged to give up everything to Western Plcs and concentrate on what it does best - provide cheap labour for sweatshops producing the cheap goods to fuel the disposable consumer orgy societies of the West.

Still, these are just the growing pains of a necessary transition to neoliberalism, say corporate bosses and their G8 lapdogs. If you wait, you'll get richer. It's an argument that's been spinning around since the 1960s; only problem is the poorest countries have

only been getting poorer. After 20 years of structural adjustment the gulf between rich and poor is greater than in 1985. In their report 'The Economics of Failure: The Real Cost of Free Trade for Poor Countries', Christian Aid estimate the damage done to African countries by trade liberalisation since 1980 to be \$272 billion. "Had they not been forced to liberalise as the price of aid, loans and debt relief, sub-Saharan African countries would have had enough extra income to wipe out their debts and have sufficient left over to pay for every child to be vaccinated and go to school."

Number One Super Guys

And to top it all the rich countries got rich precisely because they did the opposite to the laws they are now laying down through the WTO! Take free trade, something all Western powers fought vigorously against throughout most of the past 400 years. England protected its textile industry by heavily taxing imports and subsidising industry. This helped fuel an economic boom and shot the country into the Industrial Revolution and a position of global dominance. Today the West still keeps its protection barriers up, with massive subsidies to the agricultural and technological sectors, something which is made effectively illegal for poor nations. Our farmers are paid not to grow food, so food prices are kept artificially high and profits buoyant. With 'defence' spending tax payers give a boost to the IT and other technology industries, just one of the many factors which helps make war such a profitable venture.

Whilst the world economy grows at around 2% per year, the transnational corporations expand by five times that amount. The ten largest corporations are worth £400 billion, more than the one hundred smallest countries. The assets of the 84 richest people in the world exceed the Gross Domestic Product of China, which has 1.2 billion inhabitants. A tiny minority of super-wealthy people are consistently acting against the interests of the majority of the world's population and concentrating their wealth in fewer and fewer hands. At Hong Kong there'll be some debt relief for Africa, providing the countries in question play ball of course. A reduction in barriers to trade for the West will be lauded as a victory for the poor, but it'll just mean that more skint countries will be laying themselves open to economic exploitation.

But at least the leaders of poor countries know now that it's all a con. At another WTO meet up back in Cancun in 2003 (see

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For campanology...

In October, tone deaf plod from the Met ungroovily nicked two bellringers outside Downing St. This Wednesday, Maya Evans was the first person to be found guilty of taking part in an "unauthorised protest" under the Serious Organised Crime Act (SOCA). Maya and Milan Rai were both taking part in a bellringing ceremony where they read out the names of those killed in the Iraq war. Talk about dropping a clanger. Weirdly, although Maya's been found guilty, and charged £100 costs, the CPS still haven't decided whether to charge Milan. Under SOCA it's an offence to take part in any demonstration within one square kilometre of parliament without written police approval seven days in advance. Twenty more people face trial in the New Year for other unauthorised protests within the Big Ben pig pen. Ask not for whom the bell tolls... it tolls for thee.

*SchNEWS Vocabwatch: No, campanology is not about tent erection but the practice and study of Quasimodo's hobby.

SchNEWS 423), the conference ended in stalemate as poorer nations refused to accept to the G8 spin. The WTO had murmured some crap about being nicer to the poor after the UN set up their Millennium Development Goals back in 2000, which included a promise to half world hunger by 2015. Responding to pressure, the WTO organised a 'Development' round of talks in Doha in 2001 and agreed to take some positive action. But as South East trade union organiser Hidayat Greenfield puts it "It's fitting that the Sixth WTO Ministerial should arrive in Hong Kong only a couple of months after the opening of Disneyland. In both cases reality is abandoned at the door, while fiction and fantasy take over. The magical Doha 'Development' Round promises an end to global poverty and a new prosperity for all -- based on an agenda that boosts transnational corporate power and demolishes the remnants of political and social barriers to corporate profit. Like a rollercoaster ride through a fictional world, we set off to alleviate global poverty and arrive at greater impoverishment as the destination. At least in Disneyland the fiction and fantasy ends when you leave." Walden Bello sees the fantasy this way: "The WTO is like a Dracula... we really need to drive a stake through the heart of this vampire and finish it off. Permanently."

See also

* The Hong Kong People's Alliance on the WTO <http://daga.dhs.org/hkpa>

* Action Aid 'Trade Invaders: the WTO and Developing Countries' 01460 238000 www.actionaid.org.uk

* Recommended reading: www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=13&ItemID=9164

SOME "BARRIERS TO TRADE"

Governments are increasingly using the WTO to challenge the national laws of other countries which they reckon are 'barriers to trade.' Some of these 'barriers' include

- Energy efficiency labelling on appliances such as washing machines, fridges and irons (challenged by Korea, USA and China).
- A European Union scheme that ensures imports comply with health, safety and environmental protection laws (challenged by China).
- Labels which show whether a product is recyclable or from sustainable sourcing.
- Safety testing on imported foods, like compulsory testing for lethal toxins in shellfish.

THE BOOK WORM HAS TURNED

One of the many things under threat from planned liberalisation and expansion of international trade in services as negotiated behind closed doors in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is libraries. 'Globalisation, Information and Libraries', a new book by Ruth Rikowski, examines the implications for the world's state-funded libraries of the WTO's most infamous treaties - GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services - see SchNEWS 378) and TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights - see SchNEWS 420).

GATS is a set of trade rules whereby WTO member countries must open up their service sectors to the global market. Assurances made by the UK government, the European Commission and the WTO, that all public services such as health, education, water, housing, and libraries are exempt from GATS are in fact bogus. There has been a steady process of commercialisation and private sector involvement in all the above listed public services over the last decade.

So, state-funded libraries in the UK and across the world will be forced, in time, to turn into profit-making enterprises that will open the door to long-term privatisation. Brighton already has its multi million pound PFI library. (See www.roughmusic.org.uk/#four) Although the UK (under the EU) has not so far committed its Library Service to the GATS, this could easily change in future negotiations, succumbing to private companies searching for ripe opportunities.

TRIPS, meanwhile, is about the trading of intellectual rights, including copyright, trade

marks, geographical indications, patents, industrial designs and trade secrets. Rikowski shows that TRIPS is not concerned with moral and humane issues in regard to intellectual property, but instead allows corporations to appropriate, patent and then profit from the traditional knowledge of indigenous populations in the poorest developing countries without giving due recompense.

So GATS and TRIPS will continue transforming services and intellectual property rights into internationally tradable commodities, to be sold in the market-place for profit. As Rikowski says, "In Britain today we already have examples of private companies running public library services (e.g. in the London Borough of Haringey), and many examples of public-private partnerships building new libraries. Coupled with the growing pressures on libraries to generate income and operate more like private companies rather than public good providers, the 'commercialisation by stealth' of British libraries and information is an everyday reality. When a country signs up its Library Service to GATS it means that foreign corporations must be allowed the right to compete with local authorities and domestic firms for the provision of public library services. This will open up the way for privatisation which could threaten the British public library free at the point of use."

* The book's full snappy title is: Globalisation, Information and Libraries: the Implications of the World Trade Organisation's GATS and TRIPS Agreements (Chandos) or check out www.lib.org/ISC/articles/19-R.Rikowski-1.html

BURMESE SHORTS

Thinking you haven't heard much about Burma lately? Don't worry, it's still a brutal military regime supported in part by Western corporations, and Aung Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy who won a landslide victory in a 1992 election, is still safely under house arrest. In fact, despite UN and other international pressure, you'll be glad to hear that Suu Kyi's term has just been extended another six months.

In case you worried that those in power weren't continuing to stamp on any resistant locals, take heart that in late November, two thousand villagers from five villages in Northern Karen State were forced to flee from their homes as their settlements were all burned to the ground by Burmese army mortar attacks. The mainly black former residents - and by black we mean 'insurgents' as the government call them, are now living in the jungle with little food and no shelter, according to the Karen National Union secretary general Mahn Sha.

It's not any easier for any pro-democracy rebels in the southern state of Arakan either. Groups including the Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA), the Arakan Army (AA) and the Arakan Liberation Party are hiding in the deep forests along the border, presumably to avoid facing the friendly Bur-

mese troops. Some who crossed the border did not get a warm welcome from neighbouring Bangladesh, as on November 24th the army launched an operation with 900 soldiers and destroyed three of their camps. Of course, this probably had nothing to do with the fact that the Bangladeshi army chief is visiting Burma in the moment. Accompanied by his wife, he is visiting at the invitation of Burmese army chief senior general Than Shwe - no doubt for some 5-star hospitality, chats about border controls, chummy military relations and thanks for being so co-operative.

Meanwhile French oil company Total have reached a US\$6 million out-of-court settlement in the case of human rights abuses in relation to the Yadana Gas pipeline Project (see SchNEWS 488). Of course that doesn't mean they were guilty of anything - that's not the corporate way. Jean Francois Lassalle, Total's vice president for exploration and production, claimed the payments were only agreed to promote 'social responsibility' and nothing to do with facing a trial over using forced labour, or supporting a regime which represses and tortures its own citizens. Right, we like totally believe you...

* To keep up with news from Burma, see www.burmanet.org and www.burmawatch.org

HARD TIMES TO FOLLOW?

A new report from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (www.ncadc.org) describes Yarl's Wood Removal Centre as "a Bleak House of our times." It details the failures of the "fast but fair" asylum system and how most detainees never had the chance to present their case. The report is based on the experiences of over 130 women detained in Yarl's Wood. It showed that the women who were fleeing from abuse in their own countries were facing abuse and intimidation by security staff and that 57% of the women had no legal representation. By detaining traumatised women, the Home Office is ignoring its own and other official guidelines, advising against the detention of "those suffering from serious medical conditions or the mentally ill; those where there is independent evidence that they have been tortured..."

The launch of this report is in London at 11am, 15th December at the Trinity United Reformed Church, Buck Street, Camden, followed by a protest outside Communications House Enforcement Unit, 210 Old Street at 3.00pm.

There's also a Christmas carols & picket at noon, 17th December, outside Yarl's Wood Removal Centre, Twinwoods Road, Clapham, Bedfordshire. Transport from London and for further information about the report contact Legal Action for Women: 020 7482 2496, 07958 152171, law@crossroadswomen.net

* Recently Brighton resident Amir Hassan was snatched from his home and taken to Colnbrook detention centre and would have been illegally deported if it hadn't been for a campaign by his friends and supporters (see last week's SchNEWS).

Smash EDO MASS DEMO
Stop The Arms Trade - Defend The
Right To Protest - THIS SATURDAY
10th December 12pm Churchill Square,
Brighton. www.smashedo.org.uk

Inside SchNEWS

Jose Fernandez Delgado is an anarchist who spent more than 20 years in Spanish prisons, 14 of them in the infamous FIES-isolation regime, known for its brutality and systematic torture. He escaped and was arrested with three others in Aachen (Germany) in June 2004, and condemned to another 14 years. Shortly after the verdict, he was transferred to the prison of Köln. He did not get any of his personal stuff and was immediately put in complete isolation, without even being able to go for daily exercise. As a protest he refused to put on prison clothes. He then went on to hunger strike, which lasted 13 days, without any liquid for the last four. None of his demands were responded to and pressure is needed on the judge and on the director of the prison. A model letter, with post/email addresses is available at www.brightonabc.org.uk and of course write to Jose himself and his comrades Gabriel Pombo de Silva and Bart de Geeter at at Staatsnwaltschaft Aachen, AZ 401JS284/04, Stifstrasse 39-43, 52062 Aachen, Germany.

Diane Wilson, who had refused to serve a four month prison sentence for criminal trespass in a protest related to Dow Chemicals and the 1984 Bhopal disaster (see last week's SchNEWS) was arrested on Monday (5th) at a \$4200-per-head fundraiser for Tom DeLay, the former Majority Leader of the US House who was indicted on charges of conspiracy and money laundering. The highlight of the evening was a speech by Vice President Dick Cheney, which Diane interrupted by unfurling a banner saying "Corrupt greed kills from Bhopal to Baghdad".

MONKEY BUSINESS

Work has resumed on the Oxford Primate Vivisection lab, which got half-built and then abandoned after repeated campaigning and ALF attacks on the building company (SchNEWS 439). Secrecy now surrounds the project; in a bizarre "Battle of the Balaclava," it's the workers on site who are taking a leaf from the ALF book and masking up to avoid identification.

A weekly demo at the site every Thursday at 1pm has been organised. A major march through Oxford city will happen on January 14th next year. www.speakcampaigns.org.uk

...and finally...

Frogger: Game Over

Frog news roundup: Norwich City Council have agreed to put in a number of measures to help its local amphibian friends. Traffic on Chapel Break Road in Bowthorpe has killed off 80% of the frogs as it cuts through their migratory path. The Council will make the road easier for frogs to cross by lowering the pavement and will put up "Frog X-ing" signs (for the motorists not the frogs).

Meanwhile, in County Meath, Ireland, a frog breeder has been forced out of business by the Animal Liberation Front. Acid was thrown on the businessman's car and slogans daubed on buildings around his farm. He's since publicly declared his intentions to quit with "immediate effect". He has also pledged to give the survivors to an animal welfare group. The frogs had originally been destined to end up staring down the wrong end of a vivisector's blade somewhere and showed their joy by hopping off to start a campaign against the forced wearing of flying hats and goggles whilst dancing to Axel F...

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SchNEWS warns all readers to remain animated and get drawn into the action... Honest!

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