



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER MAKING A KILLING...

# SchNEWS

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THE AEGIS TEAM

## MARKET FORCES

### THE EXPLOSION OF CORPORATE MERCENARIES

Who's fielding the second biggest occupying force in Iraq, after the US? Nope; it's not UK plc with its 7,000 troops. Not by a long way. It's corporations! A recent report estimated that up to 50,000 private military and 'security' mercenaries are operating in Iraq, representing over 180 profit hungry corporations - the true 'coalition of the willing'. As ever with the march of global capitalism, it's a you-scratch-my-back, I'll-lick-caviare-off-yours kind of deal and yet more evidence that ethics are a disposable irritant in the accumulation of hard cash.

The defeat in Vietnam, with a stream of all-american boys coming home in body bags forced the US elite into more covert ways of exerting imperial power. A switch to secret bombing campaigns and biological warfare against opponents didn't prove too popular either. During the seventies and eighties the US mainly resorted to undercover 'black ops' or funding and training local militias to do their dirty work. Ronald Raygun used the secret £30million CIA 'contingency fund' to launch a war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and, like Papa Bush who followed him, bunged more than a few quid the way of the Bin Laden & Co of the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan. But big business could no longer rely on governments, struggling to deliver in the face of a disapproving democracy public, to secure control of resources and access to 'markets'. With army recruitment at an all time low and a people used to easy living, conscription is politically impossible and the army just hasn't seemed such a groovy or necessary lifestyle choice since slacking was invented in the sixties.

The suits had already persuaded their pals in government to hand over support functions like supplies, cooking, technology and transportation: so why not go the full hog? Pay us enough money, and we'll take care of anything, no questions asked, no awkward media reports, no conscription or call-up of wide-eyed reservist farm boys: just chisel-jawed hardened ex-soldiers (often recruited from countries where life is cheaper), answerable to no-one but shareholders, willing to die if the reward for living is set high enough. It's the ultimate outsourcing thrill.

Their arguments (and bribes) won out and corporations, now free to sell their violent capabilities to whomever they liked, expanded their customer base by getting stuck into Chechnya, Yugoslavia, Columbia and all over Africa. The real loot, though, was to be made by dealing with richest and most warlike countries, especially the US. As we

know, the real rationale for war in Iraq wasn't weapons, but business plans of mass destruction (see SchNEWS 462) - including those of the Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs). In 2001 the top ten US private military firms spent more \$32 million on lobbying, donating more than \$12 million to political campaigns, three quarters of which lined the pockets of Bush's Republicans. No wonder business is booming!

The donations were, of course, a good investment and companies were subsequently rewarded with massive contracts for the full scale Iraq'n'roll-out of privatised corporate warfare. Moving way beyond mere 'ancillary' support, they now carry out core tasks such as planning, intelligence, training, security in conflict zones, and actual combat (talk about making a killing!). Firms such as Blackwater, DynCorp International, and Vinelli Corporation have been raking in mega-millions while their employees (or their sub-sub contractors) are paid bounties far higher than regular soldiers wages, still subject to the budget-scrutinising, PR image-controlling discipline of a national army.

Empowered by the military might of the US State, but not part of it, they are free to run around Iraq, armed and dangerous, answerable to no one. Their deaths go largely uncounted and under-reported, but were estimated at over 480 by May 2006. Their many excesses, evident from examples of leaked videos showing them randomly shooting Iraqi civilians or abusing prisoners, go unpunished. (It was private privates having all the 'fun' at Abu Grahb.) In fact, not one of the many thousands of mercs who've done a tour of duty-free in Iraq has ever been convicted of a crime. Which is just, of course, how corporations always like to operate.

### BOARDROOM BATTLES

And where Yankees lead, naturally, plucky Brit wannabes soon follow. Part of the reason the UK government was so willing to 'go all the way' with the US on Iraq (well, it wasn't exactly a first date!) was precisely to make sure its companies could secure their place at the frenzied feeding trough. In 2003, British PMSCs had a annual turnover of £320 million. Now that figure stands at £1.8 billion. In that same period, Aegis Defense Services - the UK's largest 'service provider' - jumped from a revenue of just £500,000 to a trigger-happy £62 million - three quarters of which is comes from Iraq.

Aegis now coordinates the operations of all PMSCs working in Iraq, including

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

#### Court Case of the munchies...

Three Multiple Sclerosis sufferers are facing up to 14 years in prison for supplying cannabis choccies. The dangerous mob are currently in court in Carlisle, on trial for sending 33,000 munchi-licious bars of CanaBiz - a THC-enhanced chocolate bar - to fellow sufferers over a 5 year period. The three are part of THC4MS, a group who supply the bars free of charge to those who can prove they are afflicted with MS. The group have pre-empted Sativex, a THC based medication possibly to be supplied on the NHS at some stage although no-one knows when. Maybe the boffins keep getting stoned and losing the recipe, which is available at [www.thc4ms.org](http://www.thc4ms.org) where you can also follow the trial and enquire about getting some CaniBiz bars for yourself.

handling security at prisons and oil fields. Aegis is led by Lt-Col Tim Spicer - better known as the former boss of Sandline International, Spicer involved himself in embargo breaking arms deals to Sierra Leone and attempted to suppress an uprising in Papua New Guinea on behalf of Rio Tinto Zinc.(see SchNEWS 481).

Given all the complaints that the government tie businesses up in red tape, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there'd be tight government regulation of PMSCs, attempting to reign in their lack of accountability. However if you want to run a private war, there's less hoops to jump through than if you wanted to run a party in a nightclub (or have a demo, for that matter).

Laws covering mercenaries date back to 1870, and despite belatedly producing a green paper in 2002, following one media scandal too many, Tony Blair and pals have done nothing to actually introduce any regulations. The US and UK appear to have been more than happy to take advantage of the unofficial soldiers, utilising them to run some illicit arms here, do a bit of torture there, perhaps destabilising a country or two along the way. The only downside seems to be not being able to recruit and maintain regular soldiers any more - the government was forced to announce extra bonuses for those serving in Iraq recently, in an attempt to stave off defections to the private sector.

As the political tide shifts and both the US and UK begin to make noises about withdrawing from Iraq, don't expect their cash to stop flowing to the hired goons they leave behind to fight the next phase of their war. \*\* To read more, and the source of many of the factual snippets blatantly 'liberated' for this article, see the excellent Corporate Mercenaries report published by, and available at [www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org)

## TRIDENT TESTED

Direct action at Faslane nuclear submarine base continues against the backdrop of Ex-CND supporter Tony Blair announcing this week that he's already decided to give the green light to the replacement for Trident (UK plc's 'independent' deterrent). The police continue to rack up a ridiculous amount of arrests, and have even outdone themselves by managing to get a prosecution. The crazily ambitious target we set them of notching up 365 arrests in 365 days now makes us look statistically naive. The total number of arrests is already 330, with 296 days of blockading still to go! Proving that opposition to nuclear policy is a broad church, recent arrests include 4 members of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) on 8th November, and 15 at a Quaker's demo on 13th November. Other groups who did the decent thing and lately completed their 48 hour protest shift are the London Singing group, Power of the Word (writers) and a Performers blockade.

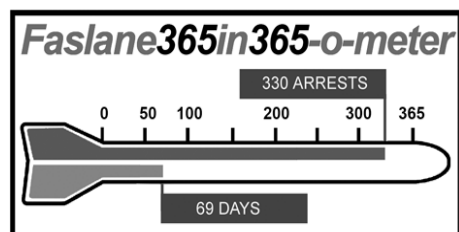
Sussex students managed to block the A814 outside the base twice during their stint (25-27 November) Using arm tube lock ons, they held the road for over an hour each time. Strathclyde police are obviously getting a bit hacked off with the continued protests - the first load of arrestees were held for 26 hours while those from the second day were released after just two hours - but only after being forcibly strip-searched in custody.

To find out how to sign your group up for yer couple of days of anti-nuclear duty, see [www.faslane365.org](http://www.faslane365.org) or phone 0845 45 88 365

\*\* The replacement for Trident is projected at £20 billion quid - er...and the rest - since when has any government contract ever been delivered on budget? (Some estimates range all the way to £100 billion). Even taking for granted the fact that simple pacifist, humanitarian and common sense arguments are bound to be ignored by politicians, the Ministry of Defence itself now reckons that there are no major military threats to the UK or NATO. So we have the inevitability of climate change on which the government is reluctant to spend any cash at all, but when we face not even a remote possibility of nuclear attack - out come the mega bucks! Blatantly ignoring the Non Proliferation Treaty is apparently a price worth paying so that UK Plc can continue to 'punch above its weight' and get a seat at the 'top table' with other bullies like China and the US of A. Dishing out juicy contracts to prop up the welfare state for defence companies involved is, of course, an added bonus.

So with politicians making the world an ever more dangerous place, collective action against nuclear weapons has never been more needed. Although neo-Labour is still 'considering all the options' and promising a parliamentary vote, more realistic campaigners have launched a pre-emptive strike at building work on the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston. The bomb-making factory is being made "fit for the purpose" of building the UK's new generation of weapons of mass destruction. Block the Builders will be at Aldermaston on Monday (11th December) to blockade construction traffic entering the site.

\*\* See [www.blockthebuilders.org.uk/pledge](http://www.blockthebuilders.org.uk/pledge) for more info.



## Party & Protest

**DEC 9th - Anti-deportation Protest in Manchester** from 11.30-1.30pm on Market Street in the city centre. There will also be an organising meeting afterwards at 2pm in the Basement cafe, 24 Lever Street. Email North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group at [fightback\\_05@yahoo.com](mailto:fightback_05@yahoo.com) or see [www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk](http://www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk) \*\* 11 - **Block the Builders at AWE Aldermaston**, Newbury, West Berks. The action will take place in the morning, and free accommodation is available for the night before - call 02077002393. For more info see [www.blockthebuilders.org.uk](http://www.blockthebuilders.org.uk) [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org) or email [btb@aldermaston.net](mailto:btb@aldermaston.net) \*\* 15 - **SMASH EDO fund raising gig**, Friday 15th December, at the Cowley Club, London Road, Brighton from 8pm with bands - Charlottefeld - and more \*\* 16 - **London Anarchist Forum** - an anarchist midwinter social. Bring food and drink to share, free, from 2.30pm at the Autonomy Club, Freedom Press, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High St, E1 7QX email [londonevents2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:londonevents2004@yahoo.co.uk) web [www.eventsandissues.bravehost.com](http://www.eventsandissues.bravehost.com) \*\* 23 - **Smash EDO Party**, from 8pm at the Cowley Club, London Road, Brighton.

## SchNEWS in brief

To celebrate the forthcoming closure of part of the Brighton bomb builders, EDO MBM, after three years of sustained pressure, **Smash EDO** campaigners held a Victory Masquerade demo outside the factory. Over fifty people turned out to show that the campaign isn't going away. [www.smashedo.org.uk](http://www.smashedo.org.uk)

\* Following on from our recent article on the **dangers of mobile phone masts** (See SchNEWS 561), campaigners have utilised the Blair's own website and created a petition on the issue. They need to get at least 3500 signatures in order to get the issue on to the front page. Visit <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/PhoneMasts>

\* **Circle community** have occupied a 100 acre farm near Bath and Bristol to set up a climate action zone, eco-project and get the organic farm up and running again. There's space for projects and workshops events etc. and they need some of yer direct action activist support asap - call Phoenix on 07769 791 387 or see [www.circlecommunity.org](http://www.circlecommunity.org)

\* **Orange is the new green!** Apparently easyJet is one of Europe's most environmentally efficient airlines. Put another way they cram in another 20 passengers on to each plane so, per person, less fuel is used for the flight than other airlines not so stingy on the leg room. Company bosses greenwash the fact that easyJet was the major force behind the explosion in cheap flights responsible for so much environmental damage. Check [www.planestupid.com](http://www.planestupid.com) for info on actions against airports.

## CHRISTMAS CARRACAS

SchNEWS' favourite authoritarian socialist, Hugo 'Ok I'm not perfect but I'm giving it a good go and pissing off the Americans' Chavez, was comfortably re-elected as President of Venezuela last Sunday, picking up almost two thirds of the vote. The election was not jiggery pokery free though; reminding about the business-friendly coup back in 2002, Rafael Poleo, a prominent opposition journalist and businessman, promised that a call would be made to the military high command to "decide if it is going to continue forcing the Venezuelan opposition to put up with an embarrassing regime." i.e. Forget democracy, can't we just get our guns out? The threat fell largely on deaf ears though, and people (less apathetic than here) queued all night to cast their votes, promising more welcome years of continued opposition to neoliberalism, from a state that supplies one fifth of US oil imports.

## CARD CARRYING LEFTY

In the run up to Christmas, Eco-capitalism marches unashamedly on. SchNEWS' favourite ethical bankers (surely a contradiction in terms), the Co-op, have just launched a credit card which can help save the planet! That's right, it's the old consuming-more-can help-prevent-climate-chaos sleight of hand. It's not really all about the consumption that's causing ecological disaster in the first place! For every £100 you spend, the Co-op will bung 1.25p over to good causes. Yep that's right, 0.125% generously given to various organisations working hard to protect the planet, while the bank waits for you not to pay it off so it can take make its 10% APR. If you fancy using the card to buy a holiday in the sun don't worry - this plastic comes with £25,000 worth of travel insurance and "discounts on selected holidays and car rental." Carbon neutral, or what! SchNEWS reckons it's time that company propagandists got the boot and the corporations came clean; their purpose is to make cash from flogging crap we don't really need and this is killing the planet. And spending beyond your ability on credit is only makes matters worse.

\*\* Getting charged 40 notes by your bank for going a quid overdrawn? The Office of Fair Trading has signalled its disapproval and reckons anything over £12 is unfair. You should be able to recover any charges made by your bank going back up to six years! Check [www.bankcharges.info](http://www.bankcharges.info) and [www.consumeractiongroup.co.uk](http://www.consumeractiongroup.co.uk)

\*\* Up to yer eyeballs in debt and don't have much to show for it? Why not go bankrupt? The laws were liberalised last year and if you're skint and don't own your own home, chances are you'll hardly pay back a penny and be debt free within a year!

## ...and finally...

Just in case you were thinking about getting a new telly, hi-fi, mobile phone or other some such eco-harming electronic lifestyle gadgetry for Christmas (it's OK, it's OK, we know you weren't really), you might want to make sure it's not Samsung. The corporation have taken their latest advertising tag line 'Imagine Pushing the Limits Further' (TM) very seriously and announced the launch of a machine-gun equipped robot guard.

No, this is not a joke, but scary evidence of the extent that a horrendous sci-fi near-future is coming sooner than you think. A snip at only just over £100,000, it's fully autonomous, using cameras with infra-red capability to 'see' day or night with 'a sophisticated pattern recognition system which can detect the difference between humans and trees'. Well you wouldn't want to waste any bullets on trees would you? The robot also has a speaker to warn the intruder to surrender or get one in the head. There are plans to unleash them along the North / South Korean border next year, in a move bound to ease the tensions between the two countries.

We don't expect them to release the hybrid Sentry-Home-Interactive-Total-Entertainment system, which will go on a killing spree unless you continuously watch celebrity reality TV, until early next decade.



## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers we're off for the next few weeks to move home. Back in the new year Honest!

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