



SPLASH THE CASH

AS INVESTMENT SHARKS ENJOY THE THRILL OF WATER SPORTS

Ever since England and Wales' water was privatised by Thatcher in 1989, Big Business has been making big money out of the monopoly of one of life's essentials.

Last week investment Bank JP Morgan part purchased Southern Water. With a captive and always thirsty customer base of 6.6 million people, the company's going to be raking in more than £1.5bn per year. During the first ten years of water privatisation profits rose by more than 160% - if you'd been flying high on the yuppie boom and invested £100 in Southern Water in 1989, your investment would be worth nearly £650 ten years later. Nice little earner! Meanwhile, proper investment in the infrastructure becomes unattractive and 'customers' (they can just choose not to have running water if they don't like it) are rewarded with ever deteriorating service and bills set to rise by a minimum of £15 a year, having already gone up more than 60% since privatisation.

Company bosses have argued that the increases were justified because of the improved service being offered. The Serious Fraud Office begged to differ after it's investigation into the company. A policy of artfully concealing the true number of complaints it receives, pretending that its performance was a lot better than reality and adding a more positive spin to customer feedback were just three techniques being used to boost 'shareholder value'. Shame they just couldn't seem to find the cash to do anything about the 115million litres of water that are lost every day due to leaks. And SchNEWS is still waiting for them to improve water quality on Brighton Beach so we can do skinny dipping without getting ill! It's been sixteen years since a European Directive meant the sewage works had to be upgraded to a decent level of treatment in the area.

EAU DEAR

The same share-boosting blags are at work in London too. Thames Water is facing a record £11m fine for misreporting regulatory required information. But still it's worth it for Australian investors who last year bought it for £8bn, almost twice as much as the previous German owners, RWE, had paid only three years previously. And RWE had done their best to spend the cash - with the five-man board of directors receiving £20m in shares and salaries in 2005! And just why has a company that has missed its leakage targets

three years in a row being allowed to increase prices to consumers by 20 per cent?

Maybe the answer lies in the fact that global water company shares have posted better profits than Big Oil over the last three years, despite the boom in price of a barrel of black gold. The Bloomberg World Water Index of 11 utilities has seen 35 per cent a year growth since 2003 - a figure no doubt helped along by the 10% a year increase in bills for consumers.

In the countries of the south, the damage is even worse as poorer countries are forced to sell their water infrastructure as part of world trade agreements or IMF/World Bank loans. 22,000 people have their water disconnected every year in Johannesburg alone. With a population of 44 million people, almost one quarter have been disconnected at some time in a country where 43,000 people die of diarrhoea each year. At least that water company was supplying *some* people with water: in Tanzania they didn't even get round to building any pipes while the UK's own Adam Smith Institute were paid £35m for spin, including developing a propaganda campaign that centred around a pop video with the lyric "Our old industries are dry like crops and privatisation brings the rain!"

THIRST FOR ACTION?

If you're pissed off with this why not just not pay? By law they can't cut your water off - all the water companies can do if you don't pay is get a County Court judgement against you.

Mass non-payment has been a great way to deal with unfair charges; it saw off the Poll Tax. In Northern Ireland a successful campaign against the introduction of additional water charges has been running for two years. Currently water charges are paid through rates, but the Northern Ireland Assembly want to introduce a separate bill for water (like in England), but of course without any corresponding decrease in the rates!

The blatant attempt to tap the the public for a flood of filthy lucre did not go unnoticed by the great unwashed and a successful campaign saw the additional water bills postponed for two years, saving the average family £339. Despite many politicians declaring before the recent Assembly election that they were against the charges, the way water is rationed for cash is now 'under review' and the scheme continues to lurk as an option. More info www.wewontpaycampaign.com

* See also SchNEWS 536

HAW IN BABYLON

AS PARLIAMENT SQUARE PEACE CAMP IS TRASHED BY GLA-HIRED GOONS

On Wednesday 17th, the **peace camp at Parliament Square** was attacked, and all tents except **Brian Haw's** taken down. In an exclusive interview with yer sore-away SchNEWS, Brian described how a small group of police stood around while security from an unknown company (Chubb was written on the side of their van) - hired by the Greater London Authority - attacked and damaged the tents and displays, which all ended up in a smashed heap on the pavement. Protesters were also assaulted during the raid - but the police didn't intervene, saying that they were 'only there to supervise the operation'.

This is the second recent attempt to close Brian Haw's camp at Parliament Square where he has been heroically battling away since June 2001, and successfully fought off the law introduced to stop him - SOCPA (See SchNEWS 543). The first attempted eviction, in August, led to the fence being

erected around Parliament Square.

Through the hard won legal battles, the GLA has been forced to concede that Brian can have his tent and also has the right to have nineteen supporters. Earlier this year a court case established that supporters need to be there, to fulfil the condition that the camp be supervised 24-7. Despite this, and having had their stuff trashed, supporters now have to set up on the pavement off the grass. Any trying to get back beside Brian are being prevented by private security goons.

Protesters from the Burmese peace camp were also told to move their tents off the Square.

Next week Brian Haw is taking police to court in Southwick Court, at 10am (support welcome!), about peace displays which they stole on May 23rd last year despite not having a court order (see SchNEWS 574).

* See also www.parliament-square.org.uk

CHEQUE IT OUT

This past Monday (15th) saw a wave of actions around the country against the **Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS)**. While you haven't ever got to look far for why banks need targeting (war, climate change, child labour, you name it they've paid for and profited from it!), Rising Tide singled out RBS (who own Natwest, Direct Line and Churchill insurance) for special treatment due to the dodginess of their vast oil investments. When not funding controversial projects in Nigeria or the gas pipeline in Wales (see www.fightthepipe.co.uk), its involvement in Angolan and Azeri oil fields encourages corruption and conflict, while gas projects from the Arabian Gulf to the Gulf of Mexico threaten environmental destruction.

The thirty oil and gas finance deals RBS signed between 2001 and 2006 means they are facilitating 655 million tonnes of emissions over the next 15 years, more than the UK's entire annual emissions.

Ironically, all this may not even have come to the attention of protesters had the bank rather rashly not boasted about it all – launching a swaggering new corporate website, subtly called www.TheOilAndGasBank.com

Over thirty actions took place all over the UK. A dozen visited the RBS headquarters in London, one scaling the building to unfurl a large banner, while others distributed hundreds of leaflets, being careful not to step on the suspiciously people-shaped polar bears having a die-in.

It was a similar story in Manchester, with the addition of a band, as the regional HQ was targeted.

Bristolian polar bears locked-on to the doors of their local RBS office imaginatively using suitcases full of cement. They blocked all vehicle access to the site and it took police over four hours to remove them.

In Edinburgh and Norwich super glue was the weapon of choice, putting bank staff in a sticky situation when they came to open up. Other attention-grabbing stunts include entering branches in Oxford and Birmingham carrying large cardboard pipelines, mock staff offering the public the chance to 'open an oil rig today' in Bath and the Glasgow RBS were treated to a impromptu show by the Treacle Tart Cabaret, a zanily dressed duo who sang, danced, waved placards and got up on the cashiers' desks to strut their stuff.

Such a barrage of actions may certainly have dented RBS's pride but it will still take a lot to make them fall... but the protesters will be back - you can bank on it.

For a more comprehensive roundup and pix see www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/10/383812.html and www.risingtide.org.uk

GROUND FORCE

The **Common Ground Community Garden** in Reading (see SchNEWS 594) has finally been evicted. Anarcho-squatters had been occupying the former Women's Information centre, left derelict by the council, since the turn of 2007 – cleaning up the site and turning it into a public garden. The council weren't keen, presumably eyeing up the next luxury flat development opportunity – and after previous failures (attempts met with too much resistance after locals got tipped off about the scheduled time), bailiffs, council workers and old bill pulled a fast one and all turned up unexpectedly on Thursday (18th) morning. Caught short, a couple of people attempted a sit-in the garden, but in the end it was all to no avail.

The green-fingered squatters involved aren't quitters however, and they are planning to "build upon the community spirit that Common Ground has created so far. Needless to say, this is not the last that Reading Borough Council will hear from us, and it may not be the last time we set foot in our garden..." Get in touch at katesgrovegarden@yahoo.co.uk

* Report and pix at www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/10/383900.html

PARTY & PROTEST

* **October : 20-21st - "Camp Hope."** - Activists and local residents are organising a camp to protest the expansion of Gloucestershire Airport at Staverton. It will take place at a secret location near the airport. Close to Gloucestershire Airport, Staverton, Nr. Cheltenham. Starts 10.00am. For address see www.myspace.com/campofhope

* **23 - The New Scramble for Africa:** talk and discussion with Charlie Kimber, journalist and writer on African affairs. 7.30-9pm at the Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton BN1 1YD. Free entry. See www.watchingthewarmakers.org.uk or contact 01273 706820 for more info

* **24 - No Sweat: Harvard Living Wage** – a film about how students at Harvard took on university managers to help campus cleaners and caretakers win a living wage. Plus discussion of future actions by anti-sweatshop campaign group No Sweat. 7pm, Cowley Club, London Road, Brighton, free entry, tel 07811 723131 email bellaciao@fastmail.fm web www.nosweat.org.uk

* **26th - yer monthly Critical Mass** - The peddle powered direct action where cyclists retake the road en-masse. Usually on the last Friday of the month at 5.30pm at a regular meeting point. For the list of known rides see www.schnews.org.uk/pap/guide.htm#crit-mass

* **November: 3rd - "Bash the Rich!"** march on David Cameron's house in Notting Hill, London. www.londonclasswar.org

EAST ANGLIER

In the run up to the next **East Anglian social forum**, the project's website has had a relaunch. Now wiki-driven with a more indymedia-ish feel, it comes complete with comprehensive news, listings and history features and will be an even better resource for any agitator types in the badlands of East Anglia.

The forum is set for November 10th from 10-5pm, in the busy metropolis of Halesworth (where's that?! we here you ask – a tiny sleepy town in north Suffolk, we reply).

* For more see www.easf.org.uk

BETWEEN THE LINES

Next Saturday (27th) is the annual **Anarchist Bookfair**. It's been turning the pages of history since 1983 and has been getting steadily bigger every year. This year will be another bonanza - in a new, bigger venue - of talks, meetings, screenings, cabaret as well as stalls flogging books, t-shirts, DVDs and obscure pamphlets from the 19th Century. SchNEWS will be handing out prizes for "Most black ink used in an anarchist publication", "Most impenetrable tome", "Least inspiring discussion session", "Dryist pamphlet", with special bonus points for 'A' symbols.

All the weird and wonderful factions of anarchy will be there – syndicalists reminiscing about the failed Spanish revolution, primitivists hunting for pot noodle in Tescos, decadent lifestyle-ists, (middle) class-warriors, post-modern anarcho carnivalistas being absurd in the face of rationality and disillusioned communists who've finally realised Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot were murdering scumbags!

* **Anarchist Bookfair:** 27th Oct, 10am-7pm, Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Road, London. www.anarchistbookfair.co.uk

* There will be a bookfair after-party at **Rampart Social Centre**, saving you having to meet in a pub. A benefit for Rampart and Noborders which features DJ Rubbish, Drowning Dog, Malatesta and others. Sugg. £5, opens 6pm with films, acts from 9pm. 15 Rampart St, London, E1 2LA, off Commercial Rd near New Rd Junc - short bus-ride from bookfair.

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

The latest at the **Hill Of Tara**, where the Irish Govt are trying to build a motorway through one the most important archaeological sites in Europe (See SchNEWS 585), is that more ancient burials have been discovered and protesters are making an emergency appeal for the road to be re-routed. The road is due to go through forty-odd known sites of ancient historic interest, with new sites being unearthed during the excavations – and being promptly destroyed. The latest discovery is at Philpotstown, where the motorway will cut into the Hill Of Tara, where they have dug up a system of ancient fields, ceremonial and burial structures, and an Iron Age hill fort.

On a legal front the European Commission is starting legal action against the Irish Govt over the motorway. The commission decision will force the Irish government to defend its position at Europe's highest court, which will lead to fines if it loses the case. The European Environmental Commissioner says that the National Monuments Act doesn't offer enough protection for important archaeological sites and that it is in contravention of directives about environmental assessment. The Irish Govt's only defence is to say that re-routing will cause delays and cost an extra 200million Euros.

There's an ever urgent call out for people to support and visit the site:

* Contact Tara Solidarity Vigil (from UK dial) 00353(0) 861758557; Fianna Nua Camp, Rath Lugh: 00353(0) 861537146

* See www.tarapixie.net www.savetara.com www.tarawatch.org

* There will be a Samhain gathering at Tara Oct 31st – Nov 3rd.- bring music, food and firewood. www.circlecommunity.org

...and finally...

Unsurprisingly, given that he was driving the bus for Blair, the steady erosion of civil liberties continues under Gordon "Too chickenshit for an election" Brown. The Legal Services Commission, after a period of ignoring all criticisms – er, 'consultation' in other words – have confirmed they are pushing ahead with the national rolling out of plans to corporatise justice that bit further.

From February next year (and in parts of Manchester, the Midlands and Yorkshire from next month) when you get nicked for a minor offence, you will no longer have the right to see a duty solicitor. Well who needs personal service in this hypermodern low-cost-high-profit age? Unbelievably, wrong-doers will just be invited to ring a call centre instead and hope to speak to a 'legal advisor' – someone who doesn't even have to be qualified as a solicitor. In fact, the company who has 'won' (why is it always *won* and not *saddled with or conspired in?*) the contract for London uses largely ex-coppers as its 'advisors'.

So anyone coming under a bit of police hassle, and increasingly of course that really does mean anyone, will now have to deal with:

"Hi! Your call is important to us, but we are experiencing a high volume of calls at the moment, you might like to call back later... Otherwise – for a drunken fight press '1'; for a domestic disturbance press '2'; and for small-time class 'c' drug-use press '3'..." all to the faint strains of a muzak version of 'Jailhouse Rock'.

* Note: if you specify you want to see a particular named solicitor then you won't get a Call Centre. SchNEWS advises all readers to get hold of the number a decent solicitor, just in case, honest!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - if your ideologies are leaky and you're out to smash the cistern, you could always try to faucet to change. Honest!

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk