



WAKE UP!! WAKE UP!! IT'S YER AFRICON...

# SchNEWS

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"...HE'S GOT THE OIL WORLD IN HIS HANDS..."

## THE BEST AID PLANS

**"I've got a firm, heartfelt commitment to the continent of Africa and have ever since I became president." - George Bush.**

George Bush finished his six day tour of Africa on Wednesday (20th). The White House spin doctors told the media how his tour was aimed at combating malaria and HIV/AIDS. But behind the moralistic posturing about AIDS (he will only fund abstinence groups and refuses to help anyone trying to help sex workers), comes the usual array of economic bribery as the US attempts to carve out African markets for its own businesses ends regardless of the consequences for local people.

The tour came with the announcement of millions of dollars of economic assistance from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). But the reality is that the economic aid is flowing in the direction of a small number of US companies rather than the countries on Bush's glossy itinerary. Almost 90% of all OPIC aid goes to ten US-based recipient firms including Caterpillar, Citibank and the Bechtel corporation. Before the lid was blown on corruption at the firm, Enron was one of the biggest recipients of this corporate welfare handout.

And here's a few examples of Bush's favourite companies in action: Bechtel whacked up prices so much in a water infrastructure project it resulted in a civilian uprising in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba and they were booted out (see SchNEWS 611 for an update on Bolivian resistance). In a great "aid" package to Turkey £25m was given to the Ritz-Carlton corporation for the construction, operation, and maintenance of their Hotel in Istanbul. Another £7m was spent mining offshore diamond deposits in Namibia - no doubt just what the country needs when only a quarter of the population have access to clean drinking water.

Bush started with a visit to the tiny country of Benin, where one third of the population live in absolute poverty - yet the country spends almost 10% of its income servicing foreign debt. Some of that debt is being written off under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, but only because Benin has agreed to adopt neo-liberal economic policies.

### W.T. EAU

Tanzania have been given a handout of £400m for transport, energy and water to "stimulate economic growth", but have a guess whose pockets most of that booty will flow into. Certainly not Tanzania's population, 60% of whom live on less than £1 a day - while the country spends a fifth of its income to repay a £4bn debt. For every £10 spent on

health, in a country where about half of all malaria hospital admissions and deaths are in children under 12 months, Tanzania forks out another £6 on debt repayments. It's true that there is some real aid behind Bush's visit, to tackle HIV/AIDS and malaria - but unless a country plays the 'free market' game, they're not going to see a penny.

World Trade Organisation rules, which are also enforced by the US, IMF and World Bank, make countries open up their infrastructure to foreign competition (See SchNEWS 524). Water companies, gas, oil and any remnants of a welfare state must be available for purchase by those corporations receiving a helping hand from the US treasury. Sadly, the largest helping hand seems to be to consultants who dream up and promote the corporate rape and pillage schemes. The big con was highlighted only last month when the government of Tanzania won more than £3m from a subsidiary of British company Biwater following a disputed and controversial contract to run the water system of Dar es Salaam (see SchNEWS 499 and 611). Biwater had merely whacked up prices while failing to install any pipes or deliver any improvement to water provision - but at least project partners - the Adam Smith Institute - did manage to spend nearly £300,000 on a pop-aganda video extolling the virtues of privatisation!

### DRAGONS DEN

Of course, as well as the stated benevolent humanitarian desires to help the continent exploited for centuries by the West - or, alternatively, the desire to open up their economic markets for the more sophisticated but ultimately similar type of plundering of their resources as in Colonial times - there's also the question of the looming influence of new superpower on the block, China. They've been out liberally dishing out dosh and investing in Africa - and with no reform strings attached. The US is naturally out to preserve its influence and keep ahead of the new 'red menace' for as long as possible.

But US businesses are often reluctant to take too many risks when it comes to investing abroad. Africa is seen as a bad place to do business because of the level of political instability. We don't want some revolution redistributing our honestly earned profits now do we?

In essence the 'aid' offered by Bush pays the companies to take these risks, encouraging them to do business in places they might otherwise be reluctant to bother with. That's why each of countries visited by Bush are the seen as the continent's model market democracies and the most stable for wannabe shareholders who might be looking for

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

....for not having a spliff.

One unlucky toker up at the regular EDO MBM noise demo this Wednesday was pulled over by a certain Sergeant Avery, who announced to the assembled that he was 'a cannabis expert'. Despite this 'expertise' it took the sergeant nearly twenty minutes to decide that the bifter contained neither Northern Lights nor Durban Poison but Honeyrose herbal tobacco.

government subsidised investments.

But government subsidies have always been a necessary way of a country protecting emerging or temporarily struggling industries. Unfair competition by a rival willing to sell at a loss, for example, could put the industry out of business only for the rival then to whack prices sky high (practices US corporations know nothing about obviously!) The lesson was well learnt in Britain during its 'golden' era rise to global industrial dominance, and is still well appreciated in er, America where major US industries like cotton, steel, farming and aviation all receive generous handouts to protect them from overseas competition. In fact, US domestic subsidies are worth around 25% of the earnings of the 500 biggest US firms combined!

But what's good for the goose is no good for Uganda - or any other African country. If a country wants its foreign debt written off, or any other type of Western investment then these subsidies must go - even though they may be needed to keep the price of essential items, such as bread, below the cost of production so that they are within the reach of the poorest people. As the cost of once-subsidised housing and food rises - so does poverty and hunger. Local factories find they are suddenly competing with technologically advanced corporations and they go bust, leading to unemployment, poverty and ever more reliance on costly imported goods from places like, er, the USA. An African clothing company could never compete with corporations like Gap which spend billions on research, design and marketing while outsourcing all their labour costs to wherever the wages are at their lowest. By taking the aid smaller nations are signing away their right to do anything other than follow the path of neoliberalism and are committing their countries to years of economic dependence on the whim and will of the richer nations.

Privatisation doesn't work. Free trade ruins small economies. Wherever the IMF and World Bank tread, poverty, hunger and inequality soon follow. There's no way that western countries are going to write off third world debt without some kind of kickback for its corporations and that's where the welfare state for business comes in.

## THE UGLY RUCKLING

**Copenhagen Riots** - It's been no fairy tale in Denmark with a full week of argy-bargy in Copenhagen. Racist policing pushed the immigrant population to a flash point when a 65-year-old immigrant man was beaten severely by police on February 9th - and it flared out to into riots across the country. Cars were set alight and barricades burnt, mostly started by young immigrants but joined by anti-racist activists and other 'avin it' types. The incident which sparked it all off was during a car search, where children no older than thirteen who tried to help the victim were also beaten. This was just one too many times for the common practice in Copenhagen of police searching people on grounds of race. It's the same ingredients as the Paris riots in recent years.

While the mainstream media did their best to align the riots with fundamentalist Muslims offended by a newspaper reprint of the infamous Muhammed cartoon - or boredom in the barrios - the real reasons were outlined when a group calling itself "Drengene fra indre Nørrebro" (the boys from inner Nørrebro) sent a letter to a national newspaper saying that the riots had been about discrimination and harassment by police to immigrants on the urban estates.

Cars and buildings - including several schools - were destroyed and around 45 were arrested and charged with arson and vandalism during the week.

**Ungdomshuset Update** - The community squat in Copenhagen which was evicted despite rioting last year (See SchNEWS 579), could be about to get a building from the council. They are making their presence felt at weekly demos outside the city council during meetings about the new space, culminating in a bigger BlokR mass action planned for April 3rd, the last day for negotiations with the council.

**Christiana** - The famous 30 year old squatted community in Copenhagen (see SchNEWS 513) was raided again last week. 200 riot police took an area containing live-in vehicles, evicting it, with 100 arrests.

\* For more see <http://english.indymedia.dk>

## PARTY & PROTEST

**FEBRUARY: 22-28 - UK tour by 'No! G8 Action'** In the lead up to the next G8 Summit in Japan in July, there will be a UK speaking tour by Japanese activists. Dates: **Brighton** - 22nd, 6-8pm, Cowley Club, 12 London Rd; **Bristol** - 23rd, 1.30pm, Kebele, 14 Robertson Road, Easton; **Cardiff** - 23rd, 7.30pm, Fancy Dress shop, 6 Upper Clifton Street; **Edinburgh** - 25th, 7pm, Forest Cafe, 3 Bristo Pl; **Leeds** - 26th, 7-10pm, Common Place, 23-25 Wharf St; **Nottingham** - 27th, food 7pm, talk 8pm, Sumac, 245 Gladstone St; **London** - 28th, 4pm, Room S421, St Clements building, London School of Economics. For more see [www.indymedia.org.uk](http://www.indymedia.org.uk)

\* **23 - Hands Off Iraqi Oil Day** of action, London, meet 12.30pm, Bond Street tube. See [www.HandsOffIraqiOil.org](http://www.HandsOffIraqiOil.org)

**MARCH: 1 - Second national day of action for freedom of assembly.** Campaign against SOCPA Laws and their possible extension to the rest of the country. Meet Trafalgar Square (North side), 1pm. Email [freeassembly@lists.riseup.net](mailto:freeassembly@lists.riseup.net)

### Smash EDO Tour 2008

Smash EDO has been demonstrating outside EDO/MBM, the US arms manufacturers, in Brighton for four years. The campaign will be touring the UK in March and April and screening 'On The Verge', the new full-length SchMOVIE about it. The aim of the tour is to discuss tactics, get feedback and organise for the future. For a list of the dates up and down the country see [www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies/index-on-the-verge.htm](http://www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies/index-on-the-verge.htm)

## DOW SYNDROME

A blockade by villagers in India is in its sixth week - halting plans by US giant Dow Chemical to build a new 100 acre research plant in Pune. Since January 16th, the road which passes through Shinde - the only way to access the site - has been dug up and occupied by locals and supporters, including 500 women from the local Bhamchandrathar Bachao Warkari Kisan Sangharsh Samiti campaign group (how's that for a snappy name). There have also been several other demonstrations at the site and elsewhere, and this Saturday (23rd) sees a mass demo in central Pune.

The campaign has gained a lot of national support, with memories still fresh of the 1984 Union Carbide chemical catastrophe in Bhopal - the worst industrial disaster in history (see SchNEWS 523). A leak of methyl isocyanate killed 20,000, injured millions more and Union Carbide bailed without bothering to clean the site up. Dow Chemical took over Union Carbide in 2001, but they refuse to accept any responsibility for Bhopal.

Not only are the protesters worried about something similar happening in their region, they also want Dow - a company worth \$54bn - to accept liability for Union Carbide's corporate mass murder and compensate for the 1984 disaster. At a meeting held near the site on February 2nd, Rasheeda Bi from the Bhopal Group for Information and Action said, "We are still suffering in Bhopal as Union Carbide has not yet cleared the toxic waste. It is the right of the villagers to know what kind of unit is coming up in their village. We never knew what was coming and we suffered a lot."

Dow claims the centre will work on energy conservation, molecular research and even low-cost housing! But while they say they won't manufacture chemicals, the plant will experiment with volatile chemicals. It is one of three new R&D labs, the others will be in Shanghai and somewhere in Europe.

\* On February 20th, Bhopal survivors began an 800km walk to Delhi to confront Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the promises he made two years ago concerning economic, social and medical rehabilitation, and provision of clean drinking water, which are yet to be met.

\* See [www.bhopal.net](http://www.bhopal.net)

## COUP DE FOIE GRAS

A restaurant in Cambridge has stopped selling foie gras after months of campaigning by animal rights activists. The last straw came when protesters from the ALF visited Midsummer House in Cambridge on Sunday and did a spot of redecorating, graffitiing the walls, gluing door-locks and damaging door-frames and windows to encourage the Michelin-starred restaurant to remove the dish from their menus. Slogans such as "Stop Selling Foie Gras" and "Ban Foie Gras" were spray-painted on to the outside of the building.

The posh pate is made by filthily duckers in France where 30 million ducks a year are forced until their livers are 10 times the normal size - whilst being held in cages so small they can't even stretch their wings. And it's demand here that helps keep these horrific practices going.

In a press release the group stated, "Because of the continued support by Midsummer House of such a vile industry, direct action had to be taken." The restaurant was closed on Monday, with staff spending the day scrubbing the walls clean. It followed Animal Rights Cambridge who brought their own Valentines message to staff and amorous diners on the 14th, protesting outside and waving placards saying "Foie gras = diseased liver" and "Don't buy into cruelty". In the end the restaurant management seem to have given in to the pressure.

\*See [www.directaction.info](http://www.directaction.info) and [www.viva.org.uk/campaigns/foiegras/index.html](http://www.viva.org.uk/campaigns/foiegras/index.html)

## PITCH YOUR MESSAGE

Last Tuesday (12th), two activists invaded the pitch at a football game between Burnley and QPR. Against the relentless march of corporatism in sport? Er no - the banner they unfurled simply said 'Campbell Causes Leukaemia' - still guessing what they were on about? It was in fact referring to Blair's one time top media spin merchant Alistair Campbell, a big Burnley supporter - who was in the crowd.

It seems that since his retirement from mainstream politics, Campbell's do-gooder side led him to become chairman of Fundraising for Leukaemia Research. Perhaps it's to make up for the fact that the leukaemia rate has dramatically risen in Iraq - caused by all those depleted-uranium tipped "smart" bombs dropped by the UK and US, which Campbell the foul-mouthed 'minister for propaganda' tried to justify at the time.

Despite the bottle to run out during a league football match, which is to be applauded, maybe the protesters should take a leaf from the master spin-doctor's book and make sure their message is pitched correctly for the audience.

\* See [www.wearechange.org.uk](http://www.wearechange.org.uk)

## On Top Of The World

Two anti-arms campaigners who were charged with 'Criminal Damage' after climbing on the roof of EDO MBM Fishersgate have had all charges against them dropped.

The two protesters scaled the side of EDO-MBM's arms factory in Fishersgate, Brighton on 23rd January this year (see SchNEWS 617). The pair, both students at Sussex University, climbed onto the roof and unfurled a banner in protest of EDO-MBM's manufacture of weapons for the US, UK and Israeli militaries, whose combined firepower have caused the deaths of over 1 million civilians in the middle east and central Asia. Several other people glued themselves to the front doors of the premises preventing workers or deliveries from entering.

Andrew Beckett, press svengali for the campaign said, "Our demonstration led to the closure of EDO MBM Fishersgate for several hours, during that time the company were not able to carry on their criminal trade at the premises." It's not too late to join the February 'month of action' against companies who work with EDO, including Guardian Goons (er, Guards), TNT and DHL.

\* See [www.smashedo.org.uk](http://www.smashedo.org.uk) details.

## ...and finally...

Squatters in Buckingham Palace! It seems that strobe lights and disappearing Fiat Unos are not the only weapons in the Royal families armoury. The Queen's been forced to rely on the old squatter's standby of 'adverse possession' to fend off eviction from large chunks of the Severn Estuary.

The land in question - which for countless centuries has been the kind of reed-choked mudflat of interest only to ducks - has suddenly acquired value as part of UK Plc's interest in tidal energy. Antiquarian chancer Mark Roberts has spent years poring over dusty tomes to acquire title to over 60 ancient lordships in the area. Suing under the name Mark Andrew Tudor - Lord Marcher of Trelleck, he attempted to gain ownership of an area known as the 'Magor' land.

Lord Justice Mummery however found in favour of the Queen - on the basis that the Crown Estate Commissioners have been issuing dredging licences since 1958. Unfortunately no record of the royal section 6 has been found and other similar cases rumble on. Her Maj was heard to comment pointedly, "After all, the Land is One's..."

### Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - don't let them feed you a rich diet of rubbish till you choke. Honest!

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