



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER WATCHING THE WATCHMEN...

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FIT FOR PURPOSE?

AS SchNEWS SWINGS ITS LONG LENS TOWARDS STATE SURVEILLANCE

It's time to get yer party masks out- FITwatch are celebrating their 1st birthday! FITwatch have been a welcome presence at demos - obscuring the view of the police Forward Intelligence Teams and preventing police evidence gathering and intimidation of crowds.

FIT teams (for the uninitiated) are uniformed officers, whose job it is to build profiles on those opposed to the status quo. The same few officers from a variety of police forces turn up at anti-capitalist, anti-arms trade, animal rights, squat evictions, the climate camp etc. Taking literally hundreds of photos at often very innocuous events, their job is to build understanding of our networks. They in turn pass that information onto agencies such as the National Public Order Intelligence Unit and the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordinating Unit. If you're on a demo and you see a group of cops with 'blue-topped' Hi-Vis jackets and long lens cameras then you're probably looking at the FIT.

Their methods could be charitably described as 'pro-active' as they follow and harass activists who have the misfortune to make it onto one of their spotter cards. One individual who's made the way up this ladder of enhanced surveillance told SchNEWS "Police men who at first are total strangers accost you in the street by your first name, trying to give the impression that they're 'onto' you in some way. You then get singled out for stops and searches and on big demos you might even get the pleasure of your own police escort! You don't have to have been convicted of any crime to end up on the list - mere suspicion is enough".

One of their spotter cards fell into the hands of activists at the DSEi 2003 Arms Fair and revealed the bizarre range of people considered potential sources of disorder - including comedian/activist Mark Thomas. At least one campaigner has been driven to the edge of a nervous breakdown by their constant harassment. They've also received criticism from the NUI for cataloguing photographers who regularly attend demos.

The FIT teams were first deployed as a police tactic against football hooligans - travelling to games around the U.K and Europe spotting known 'troublemakers'. Plans are now afoot to roll the tactic out as a form of social control on council estates. Announcing she intended to extend FIT operations to problem estates, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith admitted she wanted targets "harried and harassed." And this is exactly what they are doing on demonstrations - they are trying to harass people enough they no longer attend..

For a long while the movement didn't really deal with the issue, almost adopting a policy of 'ignore them and they'll go away' and not letting them know the chilling effect they were having on political activism.

Within the last year however the tables have been turned, and no street action is now complete without FITwatch, who have been very successful at changing the vibe at demos, by blocking off the cameras with massive black banners and following the evidence gatherers - basically doing to the FIT teams what the FIT have been doing to us for years. With these tactics, they've been honing the art of creating blind spots in the police's intelligence, making spaces in which activists can feel safe. And ironically the FIT team seem rather coy themselves - they don't like being filmed. Generally they try to get other cops to effect arrests and keep their names from becoming public knowledge.

FIT team personnel don't have a very high turnover - just think how long new recruits must take to memorise all those names and faces. That



Ian Skivens CO5494



Steve Discombe CO2558



Mark Sully CO996



CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For being an artist...

Paul in Belfast was recently stopped on the way to a mates house at 2am by bored coppers. Claiming that he 'looked a bit suspicious', they searched Paul and found a bag of paint markers. They then arrested him for 'the possession of articles for the use in criminal damage with possible intent' - eg despite absolutely no evidence they thought he was a graffiti artist. He was held for five hours, after which they let him go saying that they'd 'run out of interview tapes'.

means that some of them at least have become very familiar to us. Here's a small selection of our favourites....

Until the arrival of FITwatch on the scene, a couple of coppers with some oversized camcorders seemed plenty enough to put the frighteners. A year of activity disrupting the police's invasive strategies and, in FITwatch's own words:

"FIT no longer feel safe on our demonstrations. According to their own statements, they have felt 'intimidated' by our tactics, and we have at times, rendered their intelligence gathering operations 'ineffective'. We have seen several demonstrations where the cameraman has had to be 'withdrawn', and we have shown we can do this even when our numbers are small."

Fitwatch

e-mail: defycops@yahoo.co.uk

web: www.fitwatch.blogspot.com

FOREIGN BODIES

AS SchNEWS INVESTIGATES DICTATED RACISM IN THE NHS

As the NHS sinks into a privatised pay-as-you-go American style health system, SchNEWS has decided to take an overdue look at the state of NHS Plcs' treatment of foreigners who have the misfortune to get sick over here. They're having their right to health taken away by a swathe of laws being passed that take them underneath them

Despite free healthcare for all being enshrined in the NHS charter, overseas visitors' access to treatment has been systematically attacked since 1989, when the Tories brought in the first charges for foreigners. Neo-labour has (as always) smoothly stepped in where they left off, further tightening the noose. The latest piece of legislation was passed in 2007.

Thanks to the efforts of successive tightfisted and racist regimes, overseas visitors (anyone who's been resident in the UK for less than a year) will only be treated when it's absolutely necessary. For any treatment deemed not immediately necessary they must cough up or go home (not exactly an enticing offer for someone whose fled from persecution and poverty back home).

Whether it's an attempt to save money or (more likely) pandering to tabloid induced fear of 'health tourists' comin' over 'ere and swamping 'our' NHS (not that foreigners would ever come over here to work in the NHS), the logic of the system simply doesn't add up. If it's 'not immediately necessary' to provide a patient with drugs to hold a heart condition at bay, before not too long it'll be necessary to pay for open heart surgery to save his or her life, at a massively higher cost (about £10,000 for open heart surgery versus a few hundred quid for a GP visit and some drugs). It's nice to know though that if a 'chargeable' foetus is delivered in a UK hospital, it is not charged, just its mother.

The latest Neo-Labour wheeze to squeeze the poor and the brown out of their fundamental rights is the new post of NHS Private and Overseas Patients Co-ordinator'. These staff are the attack dogs of this latest approach to maltreatment. They function as NHS debt collectors, who's job it is to go bed to bed hunting down foreigners

Continued overleaf...

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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and making them pay or turfing them out of the country. These jobs are being advertised around the country- government diktat is that every NHS trust must have one.

Things are a little better in GP's surgeries, where doctors can operate with a greater degree of freedom than within the over-bureaucratised NHS. Luckily as GPs are self employed it's at their discretion to accept any person, including overseas visitors, to be fully registered as an NHS patient or as a temporary resident. Because nurses at a GP's Practice are employed by them and not the NHS Trust, they're exempt from the laws as well. Unfortunately not many of them seem to know this. However, GPs should know that any random generosity on their part will extend no further than their surgery. For example if the GP wanted to send them for an x-ray, the patient would have to pay up.

In a bizarre twist of government logic, the 65 page document detailing who is and isn't eligible for free treatment is big on avoiding discrimination. The most important principle (according to the document) is all patients should be treated as foreign until proven innocent, not just people who appear foreign (ie funny accents and dark skin). Theoretically, everyone who goes to hospital should be asked "Have you lived in the UK for the past 12 months?" and "Can you show you have the right to live here?" Anyone who has enough foresight to bring their proof they have lived legally in UK for 12 months before treatment should be OK. Of not expect a visit from the NHS debt chaser.

These new laws are compounding the lack of access to health of the poor, immigrant communities that are a micro third-world in large British cities, replete with developing country-style diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis. In Tower Hamlets (poor and multi-ethnic London borough) the rate of TB infection is eight times the national average.

Bucking the trend, the French-based NGO 'Médecins du Monde' set up a clinic, 'Project London' in Bethnal Green two years ago. MdM broke away from the more famous Medicine Sans Frontiers, and, like its larger parent organisation, is more used to working in slums and refugee camps than a scant few miles from one of the world's financial centres.

Staffed entirely by volunteers, Project London aims to help the immigrant poor access medical services- assisting them to overcome language and cultural barriers. More than three quarters just needed help to register with a GP, and in 85% of cases they were able to get them registered. This suggests that if staff on the front desk aren't deliberately excluding people are too scared to seek help or no-one can actually work out who is and who isn't entitled to care.

The Médecins du Monde style is the basic ethos of health workers- good old fashioned humanistic philosophy. Inside hospitals doctors and nurses are having to lie, cheat and break rules in order to protect the rights of patients, having to work against what amounts to an NHS anti-immigrant secret police.

As the UN Special Rapporteur Paul Hunt puts it: "The right to health applies to everyone, regardless of Immigration status... Governments are required to 'refrain from denying or limiting equal access' to health services for all persons including 'illegal immigrants'."

The 'Project:London' clinic is found at:
Praxis, Pott Street, London E2 0EF.
Tube: Bethnal Green, Bus: D3, 8, 106, 254, 388
Tel: 0208 1236614/07974 616852
Open every Monday, Wednesday and Friday
between 1pm - 5pm No appointment necessary.
(No admission after 4.30pm)
www.medecinsdumonde.org.uk

Campaigners have announced a global day of action on Thursday July 17th to highlight the underhand business practices of private equity firms, who are able to keep their vast fortunes and financial shenanigans secret, whilst they buy-out some of the world's largest corporations. Actions are being planned in 100 cities in 25 countries targeting the biggest and oldest such company - KKR (Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts) - and will involve worker and community organisations, environmentalists and activists.

Not facing the same levels of prying from the media and financial insiders that public listed companies get, Private Equity firms are able to build up their wealth without the irksome impediments of either scrutiny or scruples as they purchase massive companies, saddling them with the same enormous debts they've generated to buy them. Now, yer SchNEWS has no major problem with multinationals becoming debt-ridden, but this is of course not being done as part of an anti-capitalist master plan, hatched by an insane genius with a laptop and a head for hacking...

No, by dumping these debts back onto the companies they are able to use a clever loophole to greatly reduce the level of tax payable. In 2007 KKR bought out Boots for £11bn, £8bn of which was financed by debt, allowing the company to deduct around £500 million in 'interest expenses' from the income of Boots. In 2006 Boots' income was £480 million, which means that KKR effectively will not have to pay any corporate tax, instead of the £130 million they paid before they bought the chemist.

At a time when the country looks to be unstoppably heading into recession and the government is punishing the poorest by removing the '10p tax', companies worth billions are able to get away with paying bugger-all. As a statement on www.privateequitysucks.com notes, "While the money not paid in taxes fills a few bank accounts, it is sorely missed in public services like health, education and housing. While the government tells us to prepare for crisis, some people are ready to make money out of it."

* **Demonstration** next Thursday (17th), 1pm in London, meeting at Trafalgar Square (near the lions) to deliver a giant invoice to KKR, highlighting the huge debt they owe to the country's coffers. Organisers are calling out for anti-capitalist cheerleaders, independent media makers, musicians, and any other trouble-makers. Tel 07501768682.

* See www.privateequitysucks.com for more

HEREFORD BULL

* The **Hereford Heckler** have their third issue out! This newsheet is produced by Hereford Solidarity League, an anti-fascist community action group, and covers other social and environmental issues in the area. Not online - they're keepin' it real with paper copies going into the houses, chip shops, and pubs that a website couldn't reach. For a copy email kay.bulstreet@hotmail.co.uk

PARTY & PROTEST
* For listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

**SchMOVIES premiere screening
Smash EDO Double Bill**
Batons'n'Bombs - Coverage from Smash EDO's The Carnival Against The Arms Trade, aka 'Red Wednesday' - June 4th
** **Can't Complain** - Freedom to protest march, called by Smash EDO, when 200 irate activists besieged Brighton police station to complain about recent police harassment during protests outside the EDO factory, in January ** July 15th, 7pm, Cowley Club, 12 London Rd, Brighton, Free Entry
www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies

"Locals object to the loss of the public recreation ground, and privatised schools, but it's also about the increased traffic problems, and the fact that Brent Council is allowing another school to be built in the northern part of the borough when there is already three large secondary schools, while neglecting the poorer, south part of the borough, which saw four schools closed in the 1990s." - *Protester at Wembley tent city.*

The site was occupied last year for 6 months by teachers, students and residents setting up tree houses (See SchNEWS 584, 603) in the longest running protest in the country against privatised Academy schools.

The proposed Wembley Park Academy school site was re-occupied last week after the Brent Council took the lease away from the community sports ground - with immediate effect - as work was due to begin to get classrooms ready for the school, due to open this September. They have been given eviction papers, and are in Willesden County Court, Acton Lane, Harlesden, next Tuesday (15th) at 10.30am - so from that point onwards they may be facing the bailiffs, and will need urgent help.

The venture capitalists behind this Academy call themselves The Ark - which stands for Absolute Return for Kids (*sic, and sick*). The Ark is a group of hedge fund speculators who already have one privatised Academy school, three to follow, with plans for many more. They are headed by Arki Busson, a French multi-millionaire playboy who's recently engaged to actress Uma Thurman.

This school is due to begin its first year by offering students the old community sports hall - recently acquired, and in appalling condition - and a load of porta-cabin classrooms. During 2009 the new buildings will be constructed on the recreation ground, so for the first year students will be in porta-cabins in the middle of a building site.

* The camp is urgently requesting people - particularly those with experience in direct action, tents, and all the usual protest camp tat, particularly after Tuesday's court hearing.

* **Directions:** From the Wembley Park tube station, turn left, walk up the hill to main junction on Bridge Road, turn left, walk 100 metres, and turn left into the gate way to Wembley Park Sports Ground.

* Tel 0784 3282450 email hankr@hotmail.com web www.tentcityoccupation.co.uk

...and finally...

A GCSE student was recently awarded a partial credit score for writing nothing but the words 'fuck you' on his English exam paper. The marker, Peter Buckroyd - senior examiner for the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, a body which grades British high school exams - gave the student 7.5%, saying that it "would be wicked to give it zero because it does show some very basic skills we are looking for, like conveying some meaning and some spelling" and that "it's better than someone that doesn't write anything at all. It shows more skills than somebody who leaves the page blank." Buckroyd said the mark would have been higher if there'd been punctuation - so if only the student had written 'fuck you!' instead, the mark would have bumped up to 11%.

Other exam marking bodies weren't so lateral/post-modern/down-with-the-kids, with Edexcel saying "If the question was 'Use a piece of Anglo-Saxon English', they may get a mark, but if they had just written 'f*** off', they may get sanctioned."

It's a cheap shot to say this is a case of schools dumbing down, and all SchNEWS writers wish that Buckroyd was around when we went through school.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns some of our readers - don't have a fit just cos your picture didn't get on the front page. Honest!