

COMPLETE HISSY FIT

AS FORWARD INTELLIGENCE BOSS STUPIDLY TRIES TO SILENCE FITWATCH

Still smarting from the failure to contain the student rioters in central London (see SchNEWS 747), the Met are peevishly taking out their anger against an old enemy. On Monday evening the hosts of the FITWATCH website were asked to close it down on the grounds of it "being used to undertake criminal activities". In a letter from the MET, the company Justhost.com were warned that the website was being used in an attempt "to pervert the course of justice". The DI demanded that the site be taken down for 'twelve months'. Deciding caution was the better part of valour, Justhost decided to take it down.

In fact all that the FITWATCH site had done was hand out sensible and timely advice to those who caught up in the right wing witch hunt for the brave folks who trashed Tory HQ. The *Telegraph* has run a shop-a-rioter feature and the SUN has named individuals they claim were involved in violence. David Cameron has demanded that the 'full weight of the law' be brought against those involved. Given the hammering that the defendants in the Gaza protests (see SchNEWS 710) took, anyone who has the slightest fear that they might get picked up would do well to heed FITWATCH's advice.

FIT TO BURST

For two days then, cyber-cops stopped a few people from looking at the FITWATCH site. SchNEWS tracked one of the not particularly shadowy figures behind FITWATCH. "It's been real success. We've reached an audience we've never been able to before - They forced us to take the website down - but now we're in the Guardian, BBC" (even SchNEWS!)

"The advice on the site was almost immediately reprinted on dozens of sites. And in any case the site is now back up under its own steam, with a different host and a secure server. "This pathetic attempt has failed miserably. Within minutes of networking what had happened, people were re-publishing the post anywhere and everywhere. There are now over 100 sites carrying the original post - we haven't managed to count them all. We have been overwhelmed by the support and solidarity and send massive thanks to everyone who's offered to help and reposted the information.

"By making vague threats of illegality to a net hosting company the cops were able to bypass such boring democratic details as

a court of law. Although the communication was sent by the Met's e-crime unit, according to FITWATCH the letter originated from one Acting Detective Inspector Will Hodgeson, who works for CO11, the METs public order intelligence unit, who run the notorious FIT teams (see SchNEWS 639). "They've acted extra-legally - it's one thing to take us to court but this was a way of getting around that. It was an obvious attempt to give us a hard time - the usual harassment, bullying and disruption. It was a way of getting to us outside the court system."

QUICK FIT

FITWATCH as a practice arose out of the need to confront the chilling effect constant police surveillance was having on activism. Within a year of starting, people adopting the tactics had forced police cameramen away to the fringes of our gatherings.

This was all instrumental in focussing public and media attention on police interaction with demonstrators. But by publishing the names, numbers and photographs of the country's political police, its no surprise that FITWATCH have made enemies amongst the boys in blue.

Our interviewee said, "This isn't the first time that the FITWATCH blog has come up. The cops think they have a pretty good idea who's behind it. The blog has twice been introduced as evidence in Obstruct Police court cases to do with actions against police surveillance, but it has been ruled inadmissible. Certainly people have been asked about it in interviews. They've been thinking about what to do about it for a while".

And for entertainment purposes only. here's that controversial advice in full:

51 people have been arrested so far, and the police have claimed they took the details of a further 250 people in the kettle using powers under the Police Reform Act. There may be more arrests to come.

Students who are worried should consider taking the following actions:

* If you have been arrested, or had your details taken - contact the legal support campaign. As a group you can support each other, and mount a coherent campaign.

* If you fear you may be arrested as a result of identification by CCTV, FIT or press photography...



WHO GIVES A SHIT

DON'T panic. Press photos are not necessarily conclusive evidence, and just because the police have a photo of you doesn't mean they know who you are.

DON'T hand yourself in. The police often use the psychological pressure of knowing they have your picture to persuade you to 'come forward'. Unless you have a very pressing reason to do otherwise, let them come and find you, if they know who you are.

DO get rid of your clothes. There is no chance of suggesting that the person in the video is not you if the clothes worn on film have been found in your wardrobe. Get rid of ALL clothes you were wearing at the demo, including YOUR SHOES, your bag, and any distinctive jewellery you were wearing at the time. Yes, this is difficult, especially if it is your only warm coat or decent pair of boots. But it will be harder still if finding these clothes in your flat gets you convicted of violent disorder.

DON'T assume that because you can identify yourself in a video, a judge will be able to as well. 'That isn't me' has got many a person off before now.

DO keep away from other demos for a while. The police will be on the look-out at other demos, especially student ones, for people they have put on their 'wanted' list. Keep a low profile.

DO think about changing your appearance. Perhaps now is a good time for a make-over. Get a haircut and colour, grow a beard, wear glasses. It isn't a guarantee, but may help throw them off the scent.

DO keep your house clean. Get rid of spray cans, demo related stuff, and dodgy texts / photos on your phone. Don't make life easy for them by having drugs, weapons or anything illegal in the house.

DO get the name and number of a good lawyer you can call if things go badly. The support group has the names of recommended lawyers on their site. Take a bit of time to read up on your rights in custody, especially the benefits of not commenting in interview.

DO be careful who you speak about this to. Admit your involvement in criminal damage / disorder ONLY to people you really trust.

DO try and control the nerves and panic. Waiting for a knock on the door is stressful in the extreme, but you need to find a way to get on with business as normal. Otherwise you'll be serving the sentence before you are even arrested.

www.fitwatch.org.uk

* The defence campaign is at: <http://nov10.wordpress.com/>

CITY SUBS PICKET SHAME

At SchNEWS we are accustomed to cranking out the news every week with the ever present spectre of financial ruin breathing down our necks. For our comrades in the mainstream media, however, it seems like a state of affairs they're not quite as comfortable with.

Whilst the Paxman-flummocking BBC strikes over plans to chainsaw staff pensions grabbed all the headlines (at least the ones written by scab labour), local news-hounds around the country have also been taking action over mass redundancies and plans to put the squeeze on those that remain.

In Brighton, staff at local rag the *Argus* launched a feeble attempt to challenge SchNEWS' position as the most radical purveyors of news in the Brighton and Hove area.

Yesterday (18th) saw the first day of a 48-hour strike over plans to sack the entire subs desk and ship operations to Southampton. Whilst we have no love for the team that brought us such classic Smash EDO-based headlines as "SHAMEFUL", the move is another blow to the concept of a local newspaper. As SchNEWS went to print the *Argus* had yet to mention the strike in its own pages.

The *Argus* is owned by Newsquest – the mini-me local version of Murdoch's evil national empire. Itself owned by the US's largest publisher, Newsquest owns 17 Dailies and over 200 weeklies - and titles across the country are set to be hit by the latest round of cutbacks. They have already announced plans for mass-sackings at the Bradford Telegraph & Argus, Ilkley Gazette, Wharfedale & Airedale Observer and the Keighley News. The journalists then have the option of scrabbling for a reduced number of replacement jobs on far worse terms and conditions.

Earlier in the month, 75% of the editorial staff at the Southampton Daily Echo staged a 48-hour walkout after a pay freeze since June 2008, the closure of the final salary pension scheme and the scrapping of loyalty payments.

Whether it affects the quality of the drivel many local rags churn out remains to be seen - SchNEWS has been produced by scab labour and agency temps since the editorial staff went on strike in 1996 and no one has ever noticed.

DEGREES OF RESISTANCE

After last Wednesday's demo (see SchNEWS 747), students around the country are continuing to protest against education cuts.

At Sussex Uni around 170 students began a spontaneous occupation on Monday (15th) in the multi-million pound new lecture theatre building - built last year as jobs at the uni were slashed. One occupier told SchNEWS they were hoping "to continue the momentum from last Wednesday, and show solidarity with those who occupied Millbank."

These sentiments were mirrored at Manchester. Around 70 students occupied the administrative building that houses the Vice-Chancellors office on Thursday (11th) and released a statement demanding "that the university opens its books so that we know where the cuts will fall, how many voluntary redundancies have already been made and to highlight the fact that the vice chancellor is paid 20 times the average salary."

In Oxford, two campaigns engaged in an action that sounds more like a googlewhack: a "chicken flashmob" outside the Liberal Democrat Constituency Offices on Wednesday afternoon. The costumes were designed to point out the cowardice of Nick Clegg and Vince Cable who have both pulled out of recent Oxford engagements, supposedly to avoid the wrath of angry students.

FRANCE: SCREWS LOOSE

A wave of suicides in French prisons has sparked a prison warden revolt at the beginning of the week (15th & 16th). Granted, they were protesting for more staffing and better working conditions rather than campaigning on behalf of the suffering inmates, but the clash of prison wardens vs. cops must have been a pretty special sight.

On Monday, protests took place at 79 jails. The most riotous involved dozens of wardens who used tires and wooden crates to block access to three Parisian jails: Fleury-Merogis, Le Sante and Le Fresnes.

Union leaders have complained that policing of the actions - tear gas and opening fire with rubber bullets - was heavy-handed. Considering how hard cops find it to tell the difference between the innocent and the guilty on a normal day, one can imagine their heads were spinning with confusion as they faced up to their criminal justice compadres.

115 prisoners committed suicide last year in France and a suspected 45-50 have taken their lives so far this year - although official statistics are not yet available. The number of cases has led to criticism of conditions and overcrowding in French prisons. Over 63,000 people are currently locked up in France, over 10,000 more than the prison system's capacity. This makes them the most overcrowded in Europe.

However the government doesn't look likely to give in to the unions' demands. They say there has already been an increase in prison staffing and there will be no more. Not much joie de vivre in les slamers it seems.

LOVE TO HAITI

Riots have gripped Northern Haiti since Monday (15th). In Cap-Haitien, the country's second largest city, protesters set up burning barricades of flaming tires, torched a police station and hurled stones at United Nations officials as they yelled anti-UN slogans. A UN world food program warehouse was looted and burned. Three demonstrators have died as a result, shot by peacekeeping soldiers.

The rioting has been fuelled by suspicions that the cholera epidemic that has assaulted the country for the past month, hospitalising more than 16,700 people and claiming over 1,000 victims, was brought into Haiti by UN peacekeepers. This epidemic follows the earthquake that killed a reported 250,000 and left 1.5million homeless in January this year. Officials of the UN have failed to make any effort towards ascertaining the cause of the infection and deny any responsibility. To further add salt to the wounds, the UN cancelled flights carrying 3 metric tonnes of soap along with medical supplies and personnel because of the violence.

In general the protests seemed to become almost civil by Wednesday (17th), however the burning barricades remained and protesters defended them by throwing rocks at police that tried to remove them. Demonstrators held a peaceful rally in Port-au-Prince on Wednesday, marching towards Haiti's collapsed national palace whilst tearing down and burning posters of Jude Celestin, the candidate for the Unity Party, and head of the state-run construction party, while chanting "Unity equals cholera". Many of the demonstrators on the march had been recently forcibly made redundant by the national construction companies.

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

THERE WILL BE MUD

One area of the new South Downs National Park, near Chichester, has been classified as an Area of Outstanding Beauty, for councillors and oil prospectors at least, after black gold was found under the heritage site.

In 2009, West Sussex County Council granted permission to Northern Petroleum to test drill for oil in the ancient woodland at Markwells Wood, near Chichester (see SchNEWS 631).

The firm reckons it has uncovered a stash of between 35 and 61 million barrels of joy beneath the wood and has now decided to start bringing in heavy equipment and begin drilling.

The firm's boss announced: "The commercial case for drilling Markwells Wood is compelling when the price level of oil is above \$80 per barrel." i.e. At \$80 a pop that's some haul with a street value in the billions. Yee-haw!

Although there were objections at the time of the original application - the Woodland Trust grumbling about the irreplaceable ancient woodland and Natural England calling for a dormouse survey - the whole thing has gone through with little local resistance.

With nearly another 100 licences dished out for oil and gas exploration UK during 2008, and energy prices only likely to rise, this land is likely to become much less green and more unpleasant by the year. SchNEWS hopes the impending prospect of nodding donkeys on the horizon will rouse a Sussex rabble yet to make the whole project go a little less smoothly...

NEW FEATURE: DYER WARNINGS

India and Pakistan descend into nuclear war over water resources, the US shoots Mexicans on the border, a desperate last gasp attempt at geo-engineering results in millions of deaths - this could be the future according to journalist Gwynne Dyer.

After discovering the Pentagon had advanced plans for its role in a world ravaged by climate change, Dyer embarked on a round the world trip interviewing military planners, scientists, think tanks and environmentalists. The result was his latest book *Climate Wars*. SchNEWS talks to Dyer about his book and his views on climate change; what is happening and what can be done. See features at www.SchNEWS.org.uk

...and finally...

Arms dealers must be, well, up in arms at the actions of one enterprising ITT employee (ask SmashEDO who ITT are - see SchNEWS 743). One of their military hardware manufacturing drones from sector G, in a factory in the New York area, took it on himself to cut out the middle men completely.

Vincent Corey stole a 'frequency generator' - a device which can mimic the radio signals of surface to air missiles to enable testing and development - and then sold it. On Ebay.

It was only after he'd sold it for a suspiciously cut-price \$20,000 that the buyers thought to check to providence and called ITT. Corey has now been arrested and faces a spell in chokey. He really should have checked the profile of the prospective buyer a little more carefully.

UK arms dealers have thankfully stepped back from their threat to join SmashEDO and picket the ITT factory in protest at this threat to their cosy lucrative profession. But how long before the modern world catches up with them. When will manufacturers follow the rest of retailing and sell online straight to their customers? Picking up weapons will surely end up simply a matter of going to DirectMine or EasyMissile on yer iphone app and clicking on the paypal link...

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