



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER DOES GROW ON TREES...

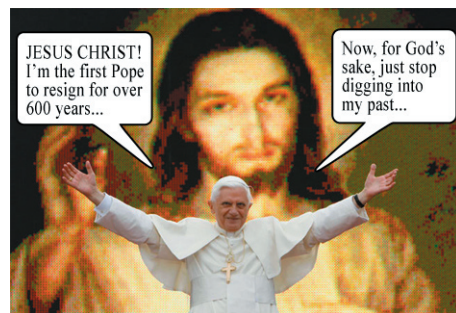
# SchNEWS

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## PARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

The Combe Haven lot aren't the only ones digger diving. A small but determined protest camp has pitched up in a more urban setting: Manchester's Alexandra Park. For the last two weeks the 20-30 strong group have been scrambling up trees, getting in the way of fence building and establishing aerial walkways to try and stop the unnecessary felling of more than 400 trees in one of the city's only big green spaces.

While the official council line is that only (!) around 260 trees are to be felled, eagle-eyed campaigners with the Save Alexandra Park Trees group have scrutinised the plans and conducted their own field research, with the help of an ecologist, and found the figure to be much higher – over 400. Despite the facts, local councillor Eamonn O'Rourke has been spouting the dodgy numbers all over the local press to try and paint the protest as unreasonable. As campaigner Ian Brewer says, "He's deluded, either he's misinformed or he's trying to mislead the public".

The £4.5 million regeneration/destruction project, funded mainly by the council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, has been in the pipeline for over a decade. About three weeks ago, it started with a vengeance. The felling of the first twelve trees came as a surprise but protesters rocked up the next day as fifteen silver birch were about to feel the chainsaw. It was a taste of things to come: Ian told SchNEWS that he came to have a look and locked his bike up, only to have G4S security guards threaten him to move the bike before they took an angle grinder to it. Nice.

Having been helpfully told by a local bobby that

if they got in the way of the fence it couldn't go up because it'd amount to 'false imprisonment', the activists took the space and saved the trees, but only for a few more hours – the felling took place under the cover of darkness that night.

Since then a camp has been set up and direct action has begun: "The only way to stop the trees being felled is to occupy them." Tree climbers have been arrested, while others have been nicked on the floor for 'obstruction' – although, in Ian's case, de-arrested minutes later. He explained the logistical problem of the protest, which is to avoid too many people getting nicked and bailed to stay out of the park. It seems the 'stop them before they get established' tactic of the cops, who are scared of popular and lively campaigns de-railing development plans, is being applied here as it has in Combe Haven.

In Alexandra Park, the authorities are relying claims of dubious legality to get their way: "We've been warned that if we get in the way of the chainsaw crew we'll be done for aggravated trespass." This may not even be legal – Alexandra Park is, and always has been, public property. However when a third of the park was being fenced off ready for carnage from the contractors Mansell, protesters were warned that these areas were now Mansell's 'property'.

So what's the big deal about the trees?

It's not just a case of protecting old trees, not that that ain't a worthy cause. And the campaigners are adamant that they're not asking for the park project to be abandoned all together. The problem is that the plans are so ill-thought

through that it's wreaking devastation – as in, total obliteration, on over 3 acres of natural habitat which is home to protected and priority species such as bats, hedgehogs, song thrush and house sparrows (already three hedgehogs have been killed, which could be a crime under the Protection of Wild Mammals Act 1996).

Planners are relying on wildlife surveys over two years old which are outdated, and ignoring requirements to have an ecologist on site at all times during works. The plans demonstrate a bizarre lack of foresight: for example, a large number of trees are already suffering from deadly fungal infections.

"While we're felling 400 trees, there might be another 400 due to die anyway over the next few years. That's 50 per cent of the trees in the park. While we've got the money we should be looking at the state of the trees in the park, replanting, and thinking about the park's long-term future," says Ian. In other examples of backward thinking, the council are destroying whole areas of natural land in order to artificially create 'nature areas' in other parts of the park.

And it's not just those scaling the trees that oppose the proposals. Over 3,600 people, the vast majority local Mancunians, have signed a petition to save the Park's trees. Before the recent activity prompted more direct methods to be adopted, objections to the plans have been filed for the last two years.

So if you're in Manchester, get yourself down there to show support for the protesters.

\* <http://savealexandraparktrees.wordpress.com/>

The link to the petition against the chopping of the trees is here: <http://savealexandraparktrees.wordpress.com/petition/>

## OCCUPY THE OCCUPATION \* Eyewitness account of Palestinians and Internationals facing soldier and settler violence at Al Manatir protest camp

At the heart of the struggle in the Occupied West Bank is the fight over land. Palestinian agricultural land has been systematically seized by Israeli settlements. Community based struggles over land annexed by the route of the Apartheid Wall in villages like Bi'lin have been partially successful. As a continuation of that Palestinian activists have moved onto creating temporary villages on land that settlers have tried to grab

The following is an eyewitness account of a Brighton-based volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement who witnessed a recent non-violent Palestinian attempt to reclaim some land and the Israeli Army's very violent response to it.

Burin is one of a group of small Palestinian villages near Nablus in the Occupied West Bank. Burin has been having a lot of problems off the local settlers, especially from one settlement in particular: Yitzhar, which currently holds the distinction of being the most violent settlement in the West Bank. The Yithzar settlers wanted to steal some more land from Burin and the other surrounding villages.

The action entailed setting up a peaceful non-violent camp, dubbed Al Manatir, on a hill out-

side of Burin that the settlers have laid claim to. The ISM were asked to attend as internationals to witness the day's events and to stay there in solidarity with the Palestinians in case to settlers or the army did attack, which they certainly did.

We arrived at about 11 o'clock in the morning on the 2nd of February. There were already a few structures erected on the hill. We jumped out of the vehicles and carried stuff up the hill. It nearly fucking killed me but it didn't take long for everybody to get the rest of the gear up. There must've been about 300 internationals and Palestinians.

Hills are very significant places in the West Bank and control of the hilltops is the settlers first priority. The settlers had just recently declared that this land was theirs, but they hadn't properly established themselves on it- it was still an empty space. For the Palestinians it was worth a shot to try and take it back before more settlement buildings sprang up on the site.

The army turned up within twenty minutes of our arrival, followed closely by a group of settlers who were in the distance watching. Nothing happened in the first half an hour but then they opened fire on the internationals and the Pales-

tinians- they were quite liberal with their gun launched tear gas canisters. These were being fired at head height.

The Palestinian response was to fall back due to the effects of the tear-gas. They would then move forward again and there would be chanting and dancing. We regrouped and went back forwards to confront soldiers. In the meantime the settlers had picked up rocks and were throwing them and firing them from slingshots. The soldiers started snatching Palestinians. A group of soldiers would target one person and drag them away, give them a bit of a kicking on the hilltop and then detain them. Where we could we would try to de-arrest if there was enough of us around. The tear-gas forced people to disperse. It was a particularly nasty type of tear-gas apparently they've changed the formula. The latest formula cleanses your land whiter than white.

All the while the army was pushing forward and taking ground from us. We tried the tactic of sitting down and raising our arms. They would throw stun grenades into the crowd of us as we were sat there. There were still around 300 of us, even though we were quite widely dispersed all over the hilltop by now. But people still did not leave the hill. This carried on for a good two or three hours.

# OCCUPY THE OCCUPATION

CONTINUED...

We were the last group to leave the hill. For me the funniest episode of the day was as we came to the bottom of the hill there was a tea stall giving out chai to anybody who was fleeing from the hill. We retreated back to the village. Two hours later tear-gas canisters started landing amongst the crowd in the village. Then the army moved into the bottom of the village: they started firing live ammo. I could hear the signature zip zip zip.

It became a running battle as the shabbab [youth] defended their homes from the army. To their credit they held them back. Throwing rocks can be quite an effective tactic even against a heavily armed military force like the Israeli army. When it's your homes and your families and that's all you have to hand, what else are you going to do?

Non-violent direct action as a tactic has been gathering pace over the last few years and the Palestinians are getting more organised. There is no room for negotiation - the Israelis will open fire on unarmed peaceful protesters; that is their standard response. This happened in Bab al Shams, it happened here, it's going to happen in other places. But what choice do they have?

## WELL RED

Big SchNEWS shout out to the Friern Barnet library crew who proved that direct action really does get the goods.

Back in September last year an Occupy splinter group climbed through an "open window"\* of a library closed by council austerity cuts and started squatting the building. Within a week the occupy group had re-opened it as a community library. The occupiers had full support from the local campaign which had tried to keep the library open in the first place.

Over the course of the next five months they restocked the shelves and organised regular opening times and even had celebrity appearances by the likes of Will Self. An eviction notice was actually served back in December but was never acted on.

With plans to sell the building successfully frustrated - the local authority Barnet Council was forced to allow a group of local trustees to have a licence to run the premises as a 'community library'. There's also a £25,000 sweetener as funding has mysteriously become available. It's short of what campaigners have been demanding i.e. a professionally staffed library but it's a start.

One occupier told SchNEWS "Although there was strong local support against the library closure - they'd kind of exhausted all the avenues. Squatting the place really opened people's eyes up to the possibilities"

After the council's U-Turn squatters formally handed keys back to the local community in a ceremony on Tuesday.

Phoenix Rainbow spokeshippy said "This campaign definitely shows the success of direct action and squatting. This is a seed of change. The whole country will soon be facing 80% of the rest of the cuts. They can take some inspiration from this direct action. We have collectively helped to save this library from being sold off for development and bulldozed. We would like to see more arrangements between owners of the 1.4 million empty buildings in the UK and squatter/ homeless and community groups, rather than the criminalisation being carried out by this government under the new law. A law we feel strongly is unjust, undemocratic and arbitrary."

(\*That old chestnut...keep 'em coming lads).

## R.I.P.

Akiva Orr, longtime Israeli anti-zionist activist, has passed away aged 81

Described by many as 'the godfather of Israeli anarchism', Akiva "Aki" Orr was an author, activist, and general anti-Zionist troublemaker who had pursued a radical vision for a democratic one state solution in Palestine and Israel for over 50 years.

Originally a refugee from Berlin in the 1930s, Akiva "Aki" Orr became politicised during the Israeli governments brutal treatment of striking docker workers in Israel during the 1950s. He went on to join the Communist Party and became a radical leftwing activist. As he would explain later "There is no better political education than being attacked by police batons".

Far too independent to be told what to do by anyone, Aki left the Communist Party to join the Matzpen group in the 1960s. Aki and the Matzpen were radical anti-zionists: they fought for a one state solution and total equality between Israelis and Palestinians. They went much further than other Israeli groups- actually, publicly aligning themselves with leftwing Palestinian factions, notably the Palestinian Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Aki was a prolific writer: His writings have been invaluable for foreigners and Israelis alike seeking to understand why their country is so bizarre. Much of his writing concerns the contradictory character of the Israel as a secular but Jewish state, and how Israel's militarism has been used as a tool of social engineering by the state.

His later writings concerned his support for direct democracy- In his book "Politics Without Politicians" he laid out his vision for an Athenian-style democratic system that would use modern technology to let everyone participate in the political process.

Aki remained active and true to his beliefs right up until the end, and has been an inspiration and a guiding spirit to the current generation of Israeli anarchists.

\* All his works (in English and in Hebrew) are available online for free at [www.akivaorbooks.org](http://www.akivaorbooks.org) \*\*\*"Matzpen", the documentary (much of which consists of interviews with Akiva Orr) is available online

## FREEDOM CHARRED

In the early hours of Friday (1st Feb) the UK's oldest anarchist bookshop got firebombed.

No one was hurt and the fire was eventually subdued. Throughout the years the agitated bookworm's haven has been a bit of a target for such hate-mongers and in the early 90s similar attacks were carried out by the then neo-nazi group Combat 18.

The bookshop opened its doors to London in 1866, founded by the "I'm a celebrity" in anarchist circles Peter Kropotkin and Charlotte Wilson.

It lurks down a narrow alley way and apparently there is a CCTV camera down there; hence CCTV footage (*now* you want it, eh?) but the boys in blue are not co-operating once again and refuse to hand the evidence over for further examination.

Alas much of their valued treasure was damaged as were the electrics, first by fire then by water. As you often finds with these bloody anarchists, they don't get insurance and the bookshop is now stuck in a bit of a rut. Any gold nuggets in their direction would be most welcome.

The shop address is Angel Alley 84b Whitechapel High Street London E1 7QX. If gold cannot materialise anarchist books would also help to replenish their faded stock.

Support and solidarity are needed to get this literary deviant retreat back on its feet.

\* As it ain't 1886 anymore you can now follow Freedom bookshop on facebook and twitter.

## TRUNK CALL

Not deterred by the eviction of the camps on the route (SchNEWS 836, 835 etc) over thirty opponents of the £100 million Bexhill-Hastings link road visited East Sussex County Council in Lewes this week.

They didn't arrive empty handed however - they turned up with big bits of tree, left over from the felling at Adam's Farm. They then proceeded to wedge them into the doors of the council offices. The council's doormen seemed remarkably reluctant to take delivery of the boughs which ESCC has compulsorily purchased.

The council came together on Tuesday (10th) for a rare meeting of all 49 councillors to agree its 2013 budget. George Osborne will have been pleased to hear that his Tory cronies voted to spend public money on the Road - which will devastate the Combe Haven valley - at the same time as it is making cuts of £70m, which will be borne mainly by children and vulnerable adults.

According to Combe Haven Defenders "Peter Jones, ESCC's bully boy has abandoned claims that the road will relieve congestion, constructing instead a myth of job creation, yet the day before the budget meeting, central Government announced £16m to regenerate seaside towns like Bexhill and Hastings, much of it sustainable and community-based. Westminster expects to generate 4000 jobs. At a fraction of the cost this is more than four times the total number of jobs that the Link Road might hope to create"

In a further development, a FOI request by Hastings Alliance revealed that the road has yet to receive final funding approval from Central Government. However, the documents were heavily redacted and campaigners are demanding to know what other embarrassing information has been withheld.

There are an increasing number of autonomous affinity groups committed to resisting by direct action. Combe Haven Defenders are now joined by a Crowhurst residents group and a local Quaker affinity. The battle over Combe Haven is only just beginning.

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

## PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see [www.schnews.org.uk/pap](http://www.schnews.org.uk/pap)

## ...and finally...

We were momentarily concerned to learn that apparently huge numbers of 'Le Freaks' from the EDL were now into Kung Fu Fighting, but fortunately it turns out there not they're not the rhythmless numskulls of the English Defence League but the rhythm-ful rogues at the English Disco Lovers group (some of them probably with numb skulls for entirely different reasons). The 'Chic'y beggars have nicked the racists acronym and are using it to promote equality, respect and, er, disco. With their cunningly-named website, [www.edl.me](http://www.edl.me) - which spoofs the look and ridiculous slogans of its target - they are leading the Defence League on a merry dance, and aim to turn them 'upside down' by replacing them on the top of Google searches for EDL.

They already passed the EDL's meagre 15,000 facebook followers on Feb 5th and now have more than doubled that. Now that's the way, uh-huh, uh-huh, we like it...

So 'get down tonight' to [www.facebook.com/englishdiscolovers](http://www.facebook.com/englishdiscolovers), and the disco dream will survive and be stayin' alive into the (Donna) summer and beyond...

## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all cool cats, don't blame it on the boogie, blame it on the social media. Honest.

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