



WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER DAM STUPID

SchNEWS

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DAMN IT!

"As the question of human rights in South-East Turkey was raised, 40 supporters stood up holding pictures of torture victims. One shareholder looked at a picture of Turkish soldiers holding severed human heads like trophies and said, "These are probably faked you know, it's easy enough to mock up pictures like this,"

Mark Thomas (comedian and activist)

Balfour Beatty, the corporation itching to build the Ilisu dam in Turkey - thanks to a little financial backing from the British Government's Export Credit Guarantee Department (SchNews 244) - has not had the best of weeks. Their Annual General Meeting came to a grinding halt last Tuesday at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Knightsbridge, as over 50 activists from the 'Stop the Ilisu Dam Campaign' decided that buying some shares in the company may be a good investment after all, allowing them voting rights and obliging the Board to answer their questions.

As the AGM was about to start, with Group 4 security surrounding the room like prefects at a school assembly, the Board took to the stage. Before they could sit down, 15 people lined up at the back of the room facing the Board, each with a t-shirt with one letter printed on it, spelling out "STOP THE ILISU DAM". Cheers and applause filled the room from supporters and in fact several other shareholders joined in, not quite realising why they were, nodding and clapping approval like they were watching a cricket match. Lord Weir promptly declared questions on Ilisu over.

Mark Thomas told SchNEWS "Suddenly, angry campaigners were all over the room, standing on chairs, trying to get the Board to just look at the photos, others rushed towards the platform demanding the company account for their actions. Group 4 started to earn their wages. Lord Weir shouted that he was suspending the meeting and the Board fled the platform amidst catcalls. We suddenly realised, as Balfour Beatty still had items on it's agenda for the meeting, we had just shut the AGM down!!!"

This hydroelectric dam is set to affect the lives of 36,000 Kurdish people, 25,000 of whom will be forcibly evicted from their

homes. 19 villages in the submergence area have already been evicted at gun-point by the Turkish military (Turkey has one of the worlds worst human rights records). In all, 52 Kurdish villages and 15 towns will be destroyed, including the ancient town of Hasankef, one of the Kurds' most important cultural sites. Local people feel strongly that the dam is motivated by the Turkish Government's attempts to destroy the Kurds as an ethnic group. There is no resettlement package so the fate of the people to be displaced looks grim.

So why the obsession with dams? In the 50's, dams were the key to industrialisation in the 'third world', a way of controlling the flow of rivers for the production of electricity. The Indian Prime Minister Nehru declared them the 'Temples of modern India'. They were seen as a way out of poverty, their saving grace! By controlling the riverflow, governments found they could redirect the water along canals to irrigate crops such as sugar cane, which requires ridiculous amounts of water. The sugar, for example, is exported, and the country then plays its part in that lovely game-Global Trade.

But big dams are redundant. While everyone is told that dams will bring new life to communities through a constant water supply, they actually do the opposite. They neglect the local in favour of the international community. They displace and separate communities and force families to flee their homelands and sustainable livelihoods. Faced with devastation, they become bonded labourers in the cities, pushed into slums. Alternatively, they are forced to seek asylum, ironically, in the very countries that have funded the projects. Do we repent our corporate sins, apologise, and welcome these victims of torture into Britain? No, we wash our hands of responsibility, call them 'scroungers', lock them up in detention centres then send them back to their countries.

So why fund such a controversial project? Tony Blair has personally stamped his seal of approval on the project, enticing Turkey to join the EU, strengthening trade links and Hey-Presto, another new arms deal is secured. Britain will be breaching International Laws if it finally decides

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For being pregnant! A woman from Faslane Peace Camp in Scotland spent two and a half hours in a cell after refusing to stand up during court proceedings. The women had asked the judge if she could be excused from standing as she was five months pregnant and suffering from severe backpain. The Judge told her to stand up or get out, before having her removed for contempt of court.

to give its £200 million backing to the scheme. So much for an Ethical Foreign Policy!!

The government have again been pandering to public opinion. The Export Credit Guarantee has been postponed until June while Turkey makes a few concessions and promises to be on their best behaviour. But don't count yer chickens just yet! This has by no means been seen as a victory. Richard Caburn, minister for the Export Credit Guarantee Dept has stated that "This dam is going ahead, whatever. If I can do it by creating jobs and getting people housed, then all the better." This is the same Richard Caburn that compared the Ilisu dam with the much hailed Ladywell dam in Derbyshire, acknowledging that there were some protests at the time, but everyone is happy now!

The Ilisu dam is just one of many happening all over the world, each one with similar stories of human rights abuses, displacements and environmental destruction., funded by western corporations. The Maheshwar dam on the Narmada River in India is another dam which has attracted foreign investment. Siemens have applied to the German Government for an Export Credit Guarantee. They plan to invest in the project in return for lucrative contracts to provide turbines and other engineering equipment. The Maheshwar is part of the controversial Narmada Valley Development Project, involving the construction of over 3,000 dams. The Ilisu Dam Campaign is getting off the ground with a series of talks around the country. If you want them to talk in a town near you, or for more info, or for a copy of 'Dams Incorporated- A Record of 12 European Dam Building Companies' send an e-mail to ilisu@gn.apc.org

Write to Box 210, 266 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DL

Check out www.ilisu.org.ukBox

June 1st, 7pm, Venue To Be Announced

Kate from The Ilisu Dam Campaign will be talking in Brighton

And Mark Thomas (if he's not in Turkey at the Dam site!!)

OILING THE REGIME

"Throughout Burma an estimated 5 million people have been forcibly exiled in 'satellite townships', where they are compelled silently to construct Burma's new facade of 'economic growth'."

John Pilger, 'Hidden Agendas'

Last Monday saw Premier Oil in London for their AGM. A large number of Human Rights campaigners joined the usual company directors and shareholders to highlight the corporation's complicity in the ongoing human rights disaster in Burma. Premier Oil are part of a consortium involved in exploring oil development in the Andaman Sea.

The project involves the construction of a major pipeline throughout Burma stretching to the Thai border. Despite the UK government advising Premier to cease its activities in Burma, and Premier Oil admitting that human rights abuses in the country were 'inexcusable', they have declined to withdraw from the project. So, facing tough questioning on Monday's AGM, Charles Jamieson, chief executive, reckoned that the company's presence in the country was actually helping to bring about necessary change! If necessary change is to be defined by aiding and abetting the military in waging their war upon Burma's civilians then we suppose he has a point.

Essential to the oil development programme, though vigorously denied by those commercially involved, is the construction of a large railway that will allow generals to protect their investment. The railway is being built entirely by slave labour, with children often as young as 10 making up a significant part of the workforce.

They are watched over by generals of the pleasantly named State Law and Order Restoration Council, with those not working to 'standard' punished by torture and death. Labourers are extracted from those villages which the railway passes by, refusing to take part is not an option and if a whole village refuses then it's head is publicly beaten as an example. The villagers themselves have no idea what they are working on as one Burmese woman remonstrated, "we were told nothing...we overheard we were building a railway so that a company could run a pipeline through."

As well as enforcing slave labour upon Burma's villagers, the project also plays a significant role in returning Burma's refugees back to the oppressive conditions from which they have fled. The Thai government, who will be the largest importer and consumer of the oil, have a nice history of giving Burma back its refugees in return for natural resources they are unable to obtain from their own development ravaged land. In 1993, Thai troops burnt two large refugee camps in connection with the pipeline.

All this sits rather strangely at odds with Premier Oil's assurances that their activities will be making things better for the people of Burma. Human Rights studies estimate that 60,000 people a day are forced to work on the railway, and that every 18 months around 300 die. So there we have it, Premier Oil, a prime example of a multinational corporation working for the good of the people.

Burma Action Group, Bickerton House, 25-27 Bickerton Rd, London N19 5JT
www.freeburmacoalition.org

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SchNEWS in brief

Spot the odd one out: Bananas that are too bendy, hedges that are too wide, garlic that is too smelly. It's hedges. Yes those bureaucrats at the **European Union** are threatening farmers who let their hedgerow grow more than 2 metres wide with the loss of 9 subsidies! SchNEWS wonders if this means wildlife will be losing some of their (unsubsidised) homes. ** It's National **Breastfeeding Week** and SchNEWS couldn't let the event go without mentioning our friends Nestle. As readers may be aware Nestle are infamous for their aggressive marketing strategies in the third world, persuading mothers to use their powered milk instead of breast milk (see SchNEWS 227). As SchNEWS went to press, a spokesman from Baby Milk Action informed us that Nestle have just pulled out of the UK baby milk market. Baby Milk Action, 23 St. Andrew's St, Cambridge CB2 3AX. 01223 464420. ** A new book **Hillgrove: The True Story** as told by the protestors has been published and is available for £9.99 + £1.25 postage. Cheques made payable to ACT.AV from PO Box 138, C. Norton D.O. Oxon, OX7 6GX. ** Those wonderful people at the **Advisory Service for Squatters** need more people to help out in their offices at 2 St Pauls Rd, London, N1. 020-7359-8814. A new squatters handbook is out soon too ** Check out **Undercurrents** weekly netcast broadcast featuring audio and visual jams with a radical content. Every Tuesday 9pm-3am at www.piratetv.net. There's a launch party on Tuesday 23rd May 9pm-2am at The Old Jam Factory, 27 Park End Street, Hollybush Row entrance, Oxford. Tickets £6 (£4 conc). Undercurrents 01865 203662 ** There's a film night showing the **Rattle in Seattle** and newly edited footage of Washington IMF/World Bank protests and Mayday screening @ the Cube Cinema, Bristol. Monday 22nd May, 8pm. Suggested donation £1.50 ** **Reclaim The Satyagraha**: Breaking the silence around non-violence After May Day workshops and discussion on Saturday May 27, 10am-6pm; at University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1 Tel 020-7586 4627 www.satyagraha.org ** Peace in South Asia – the **nuclear threat**. Public meeting with Achin Vanaik and Praful Bidwai (India's leading anti-nuclear campaigners), Bruce Kent and Jeremy Corbyn MP. Thursday 25th May, 7.30pm Conway Hall. ** **African Liberation Day** March and Rally, 27th May, 1pm Ugandan High Commission Trafalgar Sq., speakers include Ramona Africa, sole survivor of the MOVE bombing and campaigner for death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, plus evening benefit. www.callnetuk.com/home/mumia ** English folk singer **Martin Carthy** along with Scarborough bands Slinkymalink and Nick Glaves is appearing at Kings Night Club, Scarborough on 31st May at 8pm to raise funds for Scarborough Against Genetic Engineering, tickets £3/4. More details 01723-370588.

PARTY AND PROTEST

All those party and protest dates in the last SchNEWS was obviously making us go a bit cross-eyed, so there were a few mistakes.

Kingston Green Fair on Bank Holiday Monday (29th) isn't free, it's £5, £3 concessions. Free to under 14s. The web-site for the **Stonehenge** walker's picnic beginning at the Battersea Park Peace Pagoda on Thursday 1st June is www.geocities.com/soho/stonecam.htm And the **Save Our World Festival** at Brockwell Park in London is on the 18th June

For an updated listing go to the SchNEWS website and find Party and Protest dates.

ESSEX EVICTION

The protest site at Golden Cross Road, Essex, set up to oppose the destruction of woodland to make way for luxury houses was evicted last Friday (12th). Bailiffs entered the site on the Tuesday, taking control of the camp's squatted bungalow and the last protestor was brought down from the trees on Friday. Developers Wilcon Homes Ltd have ordered the trashing of the woodland to commence, despite this being in contravention of planning regulations which stated that no trees would be touched between March and July due to Wildlife Act restrictions. The protestors appeared in Southend court on Friday, 1st June with their cases adjourned until June 1st.

Golden Cross is 20 minutes away from the Hockley site, another nature rich area which is being 'developed' by Countryside Residential. At present there are plans afoot for another 3,000 homes at nearby Battlesbridge. All this is just a small part of the massive influx of new houses that is currently sweeping the South-East, (see SchNEWS 254) despite there being more than enough empty homes to accommodate those in need. The South-East alone has an estimated 90,000 empty properties, yet the government is apparently not concerned with these, preferring instead to create luxury homes for the wealthy. 01702 541267

POSITIVE SCHNEWS

Want to visit a forest garden of fruit and nut trees, check out some outlawed vegetables and other weird and wonderful crops or just try and spot lizards, slow-worms, frogs, moles and numerous birds and butterflies? Then get along to the Moulsecomb Forest Garden and Wildlife Project open day this Sunday (21st) 12 noon till 4pm. The site is behind Moulsecomb Railway Station and has work days every Tuesday - no gardening experience necessary. For more details ring Kate on 01273 628535

CAMDEN RECLAIM THE STREETS 5 YEARS ON

On May 14 1995 the first Reclaim the Streets Party was held in Camden High Street. (See SchNEWS 23) 5 years on and cars still choke Camden. Some residents have now had enough and are (dis)organising weekly actions to reclaim Camden High Street, every weekend from 10 till 6ish. e-mail camdenautonomists@microsuxx.com

...and finally...

A seven day disarmament camp begins this weekend outside the Atomic Weapon Establishment at Aldermaston and the army are taking no chances. The Ministry of Defence have leafleted workers at the site warning them about the Trident Ploughshares (TP) activists. The leaflet complains "Unfortunately there are no formal organisers for this protest and it has been difficult to establish exactly what their intentions will be over this period." Maybe they should have checked out the Ploughshares website where their intentions "to prevent nuclear crime in a peaceful, non-violent, safe and accountable way" has been openly available for almost two years now. The leaflet then tells the workers that the Ploughshares are 'engaged in criminal activity', which is a bit rich. As a spokesperson for TP pointed out, "Just listen to these guardians of an establishment committed to preparations for mass murder talking about keeping things peaceful!"

* contact the campsite 01189 820774 www.gn.apc.org/tp2000/

disclaimer Yer damned if you do, and damned if you don't. So just sit at home and watch tv .

Then you'll feel content. Honest.