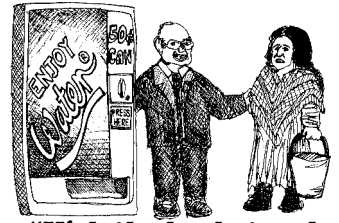




WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER GATASTROPHIC!

SchNEWS

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"Kick the bucket and use this machine"

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MIND THE GAT!

"The GATS is not just something that exists between governments. It is first and foremost an instrument for the benefit of business."

European Commission website

"If GATS gets the green light Europe can kiss goodbye its public health services"

Susan George, economist

It's just over a year since the World Trade Organisation (WTO) got a good kicking in Seattle (see SchNEWS 240). But behind the closed doors of the world's most powerful trade organisation, bureaucrats backed up by their mates in big business have been busy plotting.

What they've come up with is a few new ways of expanding the General Agreement on the Trades in Services (GATS). First signed in 1994 the agreement is all about eliminating 'barriers to trade' (see box)

So they've come up with a cunning plan to privatise the world's public services. Everything from water to housing to education to hospitals, and a whole lot more are now 'barriers to trade' creating unfair competition that must be put on the open market to the lowest bidder.

A European Commission representative singled out the European health service as ripe for 'liberalisation' (that's corporate chat for privatisation), with a US healthcare industry lobbyist complaining that health has "largely been the responsibility of the public sector (making it) difficult for US private sector health care providers."

Now that would make a hell of a lot of difference in the UK where New Labour are pressing ahead with handing over hospitals, schools, prisons, council houses etc. to the private sector. Hey, last week the UK even became the first country in the world to part privatise Air Traffic Control.

Elsewhere European water and energy companies are keen to expand their interests in the Third World. This is of course out of a noble sense of duty in wanting to help developing countries obtain things like clean water and not as the more cynical amongst you might think about further lining shareholders pockets.

Trickle Down

Imagine getting a water bill that cost you one third of your wages. Or needing a permit to collect rainwater in rooftop tanks. This was a reality for some of Bolivia's poorest families when the Government sold the public water system with Bechtel taking a major share. The charges

that the company imposed on peasant families were so crippling that they sparked mass protest. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Cochabamba City in April. Soldiers sent in to quell the protests killed six and injured hundreds others. The Governor of the State resigned saying he did not want to be responsible for the 'bloodbath' that would follow the Bolivian Government's refusal to reverse the privatisation. But in the end, the protestors won - Bechtel were kicked out of Bolivia and the Government accepted the protestors' demands to put control of water in local hands.

But it's not just been protests in Bolivia. Around the world this year there have been mass strikes in Indonesia, calling for the government to end contracts with private water companies, while in Costa Rica huge demonstrations took place against the privatisation of the country's energy and telecommunications sector. In South Africa, protests and strikes are taking place in response to privatisation, with the ANC government taking a heavy stance against protestors.

However, if the new GATS agreement had been in force, all these protests would have been futile, because as the WTO Secretariat points out, one of the benefits of GATS is helping "overcome domestic resistance to change."

What that means is that once a country signs up and decides to open up a particular service to WTO rules, it would be practically impossible to go back on any agreement. Any change of heart - tough. Change of government - tough. Popular protest - grin and bear it. Or face the trade sanction consequences.

Fair trade or 'free trade'?

Environmental laws, union rights, health and safety regulations, business regulations... We're sorry but these are 'barriers to trade' and if you try to enforce them then we will have to hit you with our economic sanctions stick.

*The World Development Movement are running a campaign against GATS, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR 0800 328 2153 www.wdm.org.uk

*To celebrate the Seattle anniversary the Independent Media Centres has put together a collection of essays, photographs, videos and audio. Check it out at www.indymedia.org

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For slapping someone with a fish!
Randall Mark has just recently spent two months inside for throwing a dead salmon at Canadian Congresswoman, Helen Chenoweth, in protest at the destruction of a forest. A week after this sentence finished Randall was then given another 45 days for previously blocking a forest road.

In effect, the 'new world order' way of running the world is being forced on every country and every person on the planet, whether they like it or not. SchNEWS reckons its time to give the WTO and its friends another good kicking...

Race to the bottom

"Globalisation is not about trade. It is about replacing local or democratic government with corporate rule."

Bob Olson, anti globalisation campaigner

* Last month, a secret tribunal ruled that under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA- see SchNews 200), a US hazardous waste company had been discriminated against by the Canadian government. The reason? Because of Canada's ban on the export of highly carcinogenic PCB waste. The ban is part of an international environmental protection treaty signed by over 130 countries who agreed to reduce their exports of hazardous wastes to a minimum and instead focus on reprocessing the wastes at home.

Tough - the treaty is a 'barrier to trade' and the company can expect compensation of up to \$50 million.

*In August, the Metalclad Corporation of America won \$16.7 million compensation and the right to pollute an area in San Luis Potosi in Mexico after a NAFTA ruling. Local protests blocked a hazardous waste treatment and disposal site being built because it would poison the local water supply. Tough - that's an infringement of the corporation's rights.

* Thanks to an interim ruling by NAFTA the US may have to open its borders to Mexican lorries, regardless of safety concerns. Mexican lorries regularly break US safety regulations. Drivers can drive as long they like, can carry heavier loads and their trucks have common safety problems including faulty brakes, tyres, tail-lights and brake lights. Tough - stopping dodgy trucks entering the US is a barrier to trade.

* Talks to extend NAFTA take place in Quebec next April. Demonstrations are being organised. To stay in touch click on www.oqp2001.org (but your'll need to speak French)

In Harmondsworth Way

Picture this ... you leave the country you were born in because either you're in fear of your life from a despotic regime - or because NATO - in its wisdom, has bombed your country back into the dark ages, covering it in depleted uranium and unexploded cluster bombs. You end up in Britain hoping for a new life and what happens? You're locked up and treated like a criminal. One of the places you could end up is Harmondsworth Detention Centre, near Heathrow Airport which, by spring next year, will have increased its capacity by six times, to hold 550 people including families.

There have been regular demonstrations held outside the prison and at Heathrow, where on 3rd August activists highlighted the case of Amanj Gafor, a Kurdish refugee who was about to be deported. The police were ready, and early in the morning took Amanj to Gatwick instead, but because he put up such a fight he was taken back to Harmondsworth. Mike Taylor, branch secretary of the Bristol N.U.J., was arrested at Heathrow and charged with "organising a demonstration to interfere with passenger safety" and "refusing to leave airport property". Mike is appearing at Uxbridge magistrates court on the 22nd Dec. Campaigners are hoping to use this trial to bring about a change in the law under the Human Rights Act for the right to demonstrate. Bristol Defend Asylum Seekers Campaign has called for a picket outside the court on the day and on the 16th Dec there will be a demo outside Harmondsworth itself. Close down Harmondsworth Campaign 07931 198501

* Speak Out Against Racism - Defend Asylum Seekers. Candlelit vigil, 14 December, 6pm-7pm on the steps of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square 020 7247 9907.

Stop Badgering Us

After killing 30,000 badgers over 25 years the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) are killing another 20,000 to try and prove badgers are responsible for tuberculosis in cattle (bTB). According to official figures the new culls cost a mere £7,000 per badger!

Despite the culls, cases of bTB are continuing to soar, MAFF seem blind to the fact that bTB is likely to spread amongst cattle because of the poor conditions they are kept in. Rather than victimise badgers MAFF should invest in decent cattle welfare. Contact National Federation of Badger Groups www.badgers.rg.uk/nfbg

*Badger culls are happening now in Exmoor National Park, contact Plymouth Badger Action Group 07780 984835 www.badgerkillers.co.uk and also in North Devon, contact 07765 631877 if you can help.

Hazardous

This week has been a tragic week for workers in the construction industry. Three workers have needlessly lost their lives. Work stopped out of respect at one of the sites in the City of London, on Wednesday, and there will be a vigil in Sheffield on Monday for another of the victims. The first six months of this year saw twice as many construction workers being killed (68) than in the same period last year. It had been hoped that the government would include a new Health and Safety Act in this week's Queen's speech, which would have increased fines and made companies criminally liable for injuries due to poor safety. The government appears to have given into big business and didn't introduce the Act. There will be a day of action for construction workers in London on 27 Feb to coincide with the Government's Health and Safety Crisis in Construction Conference. Contact London Hazards Centre 020-7794-5999 www.lhc.org.uk

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SchNEWS in brief

Conscious Cinema will be screening **Suits and Savages** at Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, London E3 (Bromley By Bow Tube) on Thursday, Dec 14th 7pm. The film examines the relationship between The World Bank, Indian Tribes and the disappearing Bengal Tiger. Also speakers, discussions, food and refreshments. Entry is by donation with proceeds to the Gandhi Foundation. Details 020 8981 8409. ** **Vigil outside the US Embassy**, 12th- 14th December to protest against the massive escalation of US military aid to Columbia in the 'war against drugs'. 6pm - 8pm Grovesnor Square, London (tube Bond Street). **If you want to stop the political Police snooping on you go to www.fipr.org and click on **Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act**. ** **Reclaim the Beach**, Midday Sunday 17 December at Royal Festival Hall Beach London. Mass picnic party on the beach in central London for a few hours. Bring food, picnic rugs, music, and all your friends. www.swarming.org.uk ** **Radio4A** (106.6fm) will be broadcasting to Brighton Town this weekend ** To show hypocrisy of the Governments road building programme while the Hague conference was going on Earth First! occupied the **DETR** ****MayDay 2001 - mini conference**, 10am-5.30pm December 16th, Button Factory, Hardess Street off Herne Hill Road, Brixton. Contact 07989 451 096 ** **National Peace Council** farewell/Christmas Party, 5.30pm 18 December, at the Coronet, Holloway Road, London N7. The Peace Network, was launched on Saturday, new address: c/o UNA, 3 Whitehall Court, London SW1A 2EL ** On 18th December **A Concrete Response to the Countryside Alliance**. Discussions, including opposing next year's landowners and foxhunters London march. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, 7.30pm. The Urban Alliance, PO Box 14672, London E9 5UQ** **Dial House**, the home to Crass, is under threat from developers, they need £150,000 to buy the house. Donations urgently needed, should the bid for the house fail all money will be returned. Dial House, Onger Park Hall, North Weald, Epping Essex DM 16 6AE Tel /Fax 0199 252 3845 Info@southern.com ** Five people have been found guilty of criminal damage to **genetically modified crops**, despite the ruling of 29 Greenpeace activists being found not guilty of a similar charge earlier this year. The crucial difference in this case was that a judge tried these five, but a jury tried the Greenpeace activists.

Bhopal Update

Last weekend saw the burning of numerous effigies in the Indian city of Bhopal, home to 200,000 who are still living with the chronic effects of the 1984 Union Carbide gas disaster (SchNEWS 238). Women protesters blocked off the central traffic area and shouted "Death to Union Carbide". The next day another effigy was burnt right outside the Union Carbide factory (still seeping lethal chemicals into these people's drinking water supply). This was a symbol of the way the Indian government has little choice but to pave the way for multinationals to exploit communities, livelihoods and environments. The survivors' organisations have appealed for renewed international solidarity. www.bhopal.org

Help is needed in The Sambhavna Clinic (food and accommodation provided). Office help is also needed. www.bhopal.net/volunteer.html

*The People's Caravan 2000 touring India and Philippines for the last couple of months, finished with a large protest against globalisation calling for genuine land reform, free from IMF/WTO restrictive policies.

Inside SchNEWS

*Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh were sentenced to 20 years for the 1994 Israeli Embassy bombings. At their original trial vital evidence that could prove their innocence was withheld. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that non-disclosure of evidence, which leads to unfair trials, is a breach of Human Rights. Samar and Jawad's case is a clear example of this. Picket on the 4th anniversary of the wrongful conviction, 11th December 3-6pm at the Crown Prosecution Service, 50 Ludgate Hill, London EC4. 0121-554-6947 www.appleonline.net/justiceuk/jus.html

The following prisoners are serving time for anti-capitalist activities, they would all really appreciate a card to wish them a bit of seasonal cheer. ****Michael Collins, FR6303**, HMP Wandsworth, PO Box 757, Heathfield Road, London, SW18 3HS ****Paul Revell, FR5599**, at HMP Wandsworth, PO Box 757, Heathfield Road, Wandsworth, London SW18 3HS, UK****Simone Sbeddu, FB2520**, HMYOI Feltham, Bedfont Road, Middx TW13 4ND (Italian)****Darryl Walker, FR5843**, HMP Wandsworth, PO Box 757, Heathfield Road, London, SW18 3HS****Kevin Townsend** (AKA Skip), **FR6275**, HMP Wandsworth, PO Box 757, Heathfield Road, London, SW18 3HS****Kuldip Bajwa, DN 7230**, HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9YG, UK****Angel Makoly, FB4689**, HMYOI Onley, Willoughby, Rugby, Warks CV23 8AP, UK

For a full list of political prisoners click the prisoner icon on our website.

Playing with their Organ

Anti-vivisection group Uncaged is back in the High Court on Thursday 14th Dec at 10AM. The group is trying to overturn a gagging order against them, which is preventing them publishing their hard-hitting report *Diaries of Despair*. Which tells of the horrific animal suffering caused by Xenotransplantation experiments (animal-to-human organ transplants) (SchNEWS 279). Imutran knows that the report could be devastating for their attempts to make pig to human transplants a reality, and so are claiming that the report breaches confidentiality and copyright. If Uncaged are unsuccessful they may be made liable for massive legal costs. To mark the Third International Animal Rights Day on 10th December there will be a candlelit vigil outside Imutran, Wingate House, Maris Lane, Trumpington, Cambridge. 4pm-7pm. More info Uncaged 0114 2722220 or check out www.xenodiaries.org.

...and finally...

We couldn't make it up. Nottingham University has accepted £3.8m from British American Tobacco (BAT) for an International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility! The Centre will "study the social and environmental responsibilities of multinational companies to the communities in which they operate".

* Cigarette makers, Philip Morris recently spent \$2 million on domestic violence programs in America and \$108 million on the advertising campaign to tell people about it. Tobacco can't be advertised on TV, but tobacco makers' token support of good causes can!

disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all those 'living in the real world' to GAT real or GAT lost. Then we'll be contented. Honest.