



WAKE UP! IT'S YER LOST AND FOUNDATION

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Companies like Rentokil are taking over the running of hospitals...



SHAKY FOUNDATIONS

"If GATS gets the green light Europe can kiss goodbye its public health services" - Susan George, economist.

After bombing Iraq it's back to bread and butter issues for Neo Labour - flogging off our public services to the lowest bidder.

The new Foundation Hospitals will give private companies a surgical strike on our health service. They will also be able to pull out of nationally agreed pay and conditions for workers. As Allyson Pollock, head of health policy at University College London says "Don't be fooled by the rhetoric: this is about privatisation."

When Prime Minister Blair talks about modernisation read privatisation. Such 'modernisation' has already been the fate of 50 NHS hospitals handed over to companies like Jarvis, Tarmac, Siemens and Rentokil thanks to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) In a study of the first 15 hospitals put under the PFI operating table a third of hospital beds have so far been amputated.

Foundation Hospitals and PFI's are just what the corporations ordered. These very same corporations are busy pushing for a new round of GATS - the General Agreement on Trade in Services, first signed in 1994 by the World Trade Organisation. GATS aims to remove 'barriers to trade' (which are there to protect us - health and safety rules, environmental laws, planning regulations, etc.) and open up what's left of our public services to private corporations - forever.

Once you've signed away a certain section of your public services to GATS then there is no going back, because the aim of GATS is 'progressive liberalisation' - a way of ensuring that eventually no other model of service delivery other than by the private sector is available. For example despite private companies making a complete pigs ear of our railways, bringing rail maintenance and repair services back under some form of public ownership would breach the UK's existing GATS commitments. The government would then be taken to a World Trade Organisation tribunal made up of unelected trade lawyers who meet in secret and subsequently told to change the offending law or regulation - or face the massive trade sanctions consequences.

BLAIR BONES

Since the government reckons private companies are obviously the right choice for running our hospitals, here's a little reminder of how corporations have been doing elsewhere. In education, where Local Education Authority's (LEA) are so under-funded that they cannot afford to put in bids to run their own show, companies like Jarvis are doing a great job. With no previous experience in education, they've recently been awarded a £1.9m

contract to provide 'support' for 700 under-performing secondary schools. Surely that's not the same Jarvis that's under investigation for its part in the Potters Bar rail crash? Yep. Or the Jarvis that kept thousands of kids out of school in Liverpool for two weeks and 20 schools in the Huddersfield area closed, because they hadn't completed works on time? The very same. But surely its not the same Jarvis recently joined by two defectors from rival firm WS Atkins. Atkins recently pulled out of their contract to run Southwark LEA after only two years because "We had bitten off more than we could chew" and because there was no profit to be had, which resulted in the company losing 90% of its value in six months, but not before the number of schools in special measures in the borough had risen due to their incompetence? Yes, *that* Jarvis. Ah, parents can sleep safe at night then.

The school standards minister, David Miliband, justified Jarvis' appointment by saying that "Ofsted have said there is a real problem in the quality of support going to the lowest-performing schools." Is that the same Ofsted that's farming its school inspections out to companies like Nord Anglia who also run schools? No conflict of interest there then.

Despite an Audit Commission report published in January that found the first PFI schools to be "significantly worse" than other new schools in England and Wales, the government in its wisdom remains convinced that PFI in education is the way forward. Defence and shipping company Vosper Thorneycroft has just won a £100m deal to take over the running of Surrey's LEA, the first award to be made for a successful LEA. Vosper's CEO made no attempt to disguise the motivation behind their bid when he boasted "It is £100m over 7 years. If we are able to catch some of the other LEAs we could double or treble our size over that period of time."

ROTTEN BOARDS

They'd better be careful not to fall victim to the level of greed that almost sunk Amey, the company who took on a third share of the London Underground deal, and also went on to grab contracts for the Ministry of Defence, the Edinburgh school system, and Network Rail - including the Croydon Tram service-which almost went belly up when Amey failed for reasons of mis-management and too-fast growth. No contract-breaking penalties for Amey however, instead they were free to sell their contracts on, for £80m to Spanish construction group Ferrovial, the first foreign firm to get their mitts on Britain's public services.

Meanwhile, our old mates WS Atkins are on the loose again, as part of the design team for the new Birmingham Northern Relief Road, the 27-mile motorway that seems set to fail in

A BREAST OF THE WEEK

A Canadian woman was threatened with 24 hour detention for "taking part in terrorist actions against a U.S. citizen in international airspace while on an American flight during a time of war". Her crime? Explosives in her handbag? Nope - refusing to stop breastfeeding her 4-month-old baby, on a flight from Houston to Vancouver. The threat came after an American man on the plane felt assaulted by her "subversive" behaviour, and demanded that the woman be charged with assault and an act of war against an American (what a tit!). Luckily for the woman there were no laws against breastfeeding in Canada and she managed to walk free once the plane landed in Vancouver.

its objectives before work is completed. The road is being built, - despite huge opposition and legal challenges from the local community and environmental groups - by joint venture company CAMBBA (Carillion, McAlpine, Balfour Beatty and Amec) who will also be the operating company after completion. One of the reasons given for building the road was the diversion of heavy polluting trucks off the M6 and out of Birmingham, but the £11 per trip toll that CAMBBA plan to impose on lorry drivers (as opposed to £3 per car) will almost certainly keep those trucks trundling over Spaghetti Junction. And the reasoning behind this can only be guessed at, but Friends of the Earth probably aren't far from the truth: "...a lorry damages the road infrastructure as much as 100 times more than a car. They're going to want to attract cars, which give them revenue, but not lorries, which cause damage."

So, that's health, education, transport - and so to public housing, what's left of it. The government is committing £40m into an estate in Manchester as the first of eight 'social housing' PFI projects. The Grove Village consortium, led by Nationwide Building Society and house builder Gleeson, will revamp the 1,090 home estate, then sell most of it on to private buyers. Jane Robinson from Unison has said that councils have been left with little option but to use PFI through lack of government funding and that the quest for profit by private companies is "not appropriate in public services, where there's a range of other responsibilities to be taken into account." But then we all know that the only responsibility big companies care about is their responsibilities to line the pockets of their shareholders.

* 'Serving (Up) The Nation: A guide to the UK's commitments under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services.' Copies from the World Development Movement 020 7274 7630 or read it at www.wdm.org.uk WDM have also organised a 'Whose rules rule? Conference 14 - 15 June University of Bradford.

* 31 May Defend Council Housing National Conference Friends Meeting House, Purchase St. Liverpool www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk Tel. 020 7987 9989

BODY COUNT

"We don't do body counts," said General Tommy Franks, Head of US Central Command, when asked about civilian casualties in Iraq.

Nevertheless hospital records in Baghdad released this week show that American cluster bombs and other weapons of indiscriminate destruction murdered at least 2,300 civilians and injured at least 7000. The death toll for the rest of the country still remains unclear - Iraqi Red Crescent say they will have figures in mid-May - but it's sure to run into thousands. Is that enough deaths to avenge September 11th? And don't let's forget the Iraqi civilian death toll due to sanctions that now stands at an unthinkable 1.5 million. Or that the World Health Organisation today issued a warning that a cholera epidemic is 'inevitable' in Southern Iraq, in which thousands more could die.

So why doesn't Tommy want to face the bloody truth? Well it's one of those inconvenient details, one of those spammers in the works of the mighty lying propaganda machine that promised no civilian deaths, loads of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and a dead dictator.

The horrific effects of Depleted Uranium (DU) weapons as used in Iraq were highlighted last Saturday when 80 people protested at the weapons test site near Dundrennan, Kirkcudbright in Eire, which has been testing DU weapons for 20 years! Ken Dale from the Red Cross spoke of the massive increase in childhood leukaemia in Iraq since the last Gulf War, with drugs to treat it unavailable thanks to UN sanctions. The marchers also heard how the UK government is currently ignoring pleas to decontaminate DU sites in Iraq.

* 29th May is the 2nd International Day of Action against DU with the Galloway Coalition for Peace holding another demo at Dundrennan 4.30 - 7.30 pm www.cadu.org.uk

DEAD PEACEFUL

Pro-Palestinian activists are now being barred from entering the country, and many already there are being expelled. The families of British activists, UN and peace workers who have been shot by Israeli forces (3 in the last few months) have complained that the UK government seemed not even a little bit interested in putting pressure on Israel to open investigations into the shootings but is now bending over backwards to help this latest Israeli move. The plan, drafted by the Israel Defence Force (IDF) is a means of further isolating the Palestinian people and ensuring there are less people around to witness or report on further atrocities in Gaza. Activists have been labelled by the IDF as 'provocateurs' and 'riot inciters' but most belong to the International Solidarity Movement and are prepared to act as 'human shields' to protect Palestinians and their homes, and to help safe passage through Gaza and the West Bank. www.ism-london.org and www.palsolidarity.org

* National Rally for Palestine in Trafalgar Sq, including speakers from ISM, Jewish peace groups and Palestinian organisations, Sat 17th May noon Trafalgar Sq 020 7700 6192 or info@palestinecampaign.org

* Rave Against The Occupation, a Palestinian night of Live Music, DJ's, Films and Comedy Yallah 17th May at Sahara Nights, 257-259 Pentoville Rd, Kings Cross, London N1 tickets £8/£5. 07776 243164

* ISM Training Day - a preparation day for those wishing to go to Palestine 18th May Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, Bow, London, E3.11am- 5pm For info and booking email: rachel@ism-london.org or 020 7263 3040

* Palestinian Youth Leaders speak at the Circus Circus pub (upstairs), Preston Circus, Brighton, 7pm 14th May. other dates round the country 07786 628107 www.slpvouth.org

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SchNEWS in brief

For a round up of last week's **May Day** around the world go to www.indymedia.org ** There were about **30 arrests at this years London Mayday**. The Legal Defence & Monitoring Group (LDMG) are seeking witnesses. If you saw an arrest or have photos or video footage contact ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk or post: LDMG, c/o BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX. ** **Dirtier Weekend** - anti bypass play set in a road protest tunnel: 9th - 9.30pm, 10th/11th - 7pm Marlborough Theatre, 4 Princes St, Brighton ** **SEReN** is Wales' new weekly alternative bi-lingual newsletter. Subscriptions £5 to SEReN, PO Box 661, Wreccsam, LL11 1QU. Writers, distributors and stories needed www.serencymru.org ** **The killing of badgers**, who are a scapegoat for TB in cattle, will start again this month. Actions will take place across the country www.badgerkillers.co.uk: 07817 858166 ** The Essex school girl who took her schools Board of Governors to the High Court, after she was expelled from school for 30 days for organising anti-war demos, has now been allowed back to school but not until the high court judge had told her that she was a **"very silly girl"**. Now that will teach her! ** Public meeting: **The War on Terror threatens us all**, Tues 13th, Moses Room, Houses of Parliament, 7pm. Speakers include Mark Thomas and Michael Mansfield QC. www.cacc.org.uk ** **The London Detainees Support Group**, who support detainees held at Harmondsworth Removals Centre desperately need volunteers. Contact Amanda or Matt on 020 7700 0606 ** Bus to **Haslar Prison, Portsmouth** from Brighton next Monday (12) to show support for refugees on hunger strike. Meet noon from St Peter's Church. Bring things to make a noise nooneisilegal2002@yahoo.co.uk ** **Cardiff Anarchist Network** will screen **Genoa Red Zone** to raise awareness about the forthcoming G8 summit in Evian. 2pm, 18th May at Chapter Cinema 1, Market Rd, Canton, Cardiff. £2.50/£3 www.geocities.com/bozavine/can ** **Hove action for Peace** have organised transport to next months G8 Summit, details: megan.mccauley@lycos.co.uk ** **Congratulations to the Devizes Guardians** who have won three seats in last weeks elections with a pro-community stance and under the banner of saving a local tree!

BULLETSHIT

Mario Placanica, the police officer that shot dead anti-capitalist protester, Carlo Giuliani, at the protests against the G8 summit in Genoa 2001 (see SchNEWS 314/5) won't face prosecution. Carlo was shot when a group of protesters attacked a Carabinieri (paramilitary police) landrover. The reason the authorities have given for not prosecuting is that the police were acting in self-defence and that Placanica did not aim the gun at Carlo Giuliani, but shot towards the sky to scare the protesters and the bullet was deviated by a rock in its trajectory! This is despite their being photo evidence of the gun being pointed at the protesters.

The driver of the landrover, Officer Filippo Cavataio, who twice drove over Carlo's body will also not face prosecution as this only caused light wounds! Er, bullets bouncing off rocks and landrovers that cause light wounds when they run you over? Welcome to Italian justice. www.indymedia.org

* Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, the billionaire who shares power with the fascists, is in court accused of bribing a judge to bar the sale of the state-owned food giant SME to Carlo de Benedetti, owner of Buiton. The trial is expected to last for months. To protect himself, he is introducing legislation for members of parliament to be immune from prosecution. He argues that it would be good for the country - good for him and his cronies more like!

SPAIN IN THE ARSE

Spain's unpopular Prime Minister José Maria Aznar, who ignored 90 percent of his country when he joined the un-coalition in the war on Iraq, looks set to introduce new laws that would impress even Franco (the former Spanish dictator). The proposals include a new law making it an offence to carry out public actions or to publish 'false' information that weakens the morale of the population or provokes disloyalty amongst the Spanish military. The laws would apply not only to actions against Spanish military involvement, but also to actions carried out "against an Allied power". If approved, it could result in the hundreds of thousands who repeatedly protested against the government's backing of the war in Iraq being sanctioned for "defeatism" by a military court. Their punishment could be one to six years in prison. The way he's going though most people predict that it will be Aznar himself who'll be defeated at next year's elections www.statewatch.org/news/2003/apr/17spainwarlaw

Positive SchNEWS

The people of Iraq have undoubtedly got a lot of work to do before they are really liberated. Part of this is the establishment of their own independent media. Bristol Indymedia have made contact with people in Iraq who want to work to set up an Iraqi Indymedia, and are going to provide them with ongoing support. If you'd like to get involved, or can contribute technical support or equipment then contact bristol@lists.indymedia.org. Donations can be sent to Bristol Indymedia, Box 7, Greenleaf Bookshop, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB, please indicate that the money is for Iraq IMC.

Inside SchNEWS

There will be a gathering outside Gloucester Prison this Sunday (11th) at 1pm to show support for two Oxford peace activists awaiting trial for attempting to disarm a B-52 bomber at RAF Fairford in March. Oxford Support Group - 01865 423200.

Send letters of solidarity to Toby Olditch JT 5132 and Phillip Pritchard JT 5131 both at HMP Gloucester, Barrack Square, Gloucester, GL1 2JN. For a list of peace prisoners see www.j-n-v.org/prisoners.htm

* Protesters involved in mass trespasses at Shannon Airport, Ireland last October were in court last week. Eight of the nine were found guilty of trespass or criminal damage, banned from County Clare (unless they lived there) for up to two years, and received fines of between 50- 3,150 Euros. Donations are urgently needed to help pay fines and costs for these and other direct action defendants arrested on actions at the airport. Shannon airport has been used for the refuelling of US planes used to bomb Iraq. Cheques can be made out to Shannon Solidarity, and sent to Shannon Solidarity c/o Ecology Society, Students Centre, NUIG, Newcastle, Galway. www.indymedia.ie

...and finally...

Always on the lookout to profit from public anxiety, especially if it involves death and disease, biotech companies and research institutions from all round the world and even the US government are queuing up to be the proud owner of a new patent.... for the SARS virus. It seems the whole virus is up for grabs with groups claiming ownership of everything from bits of genetic material to the entire virus itself. Ahhh - Just imagine sitting back and watching the royalties roll in as the death toll increases.

Disclaimer

No disclaimer this week due to writers building block. More grand columns and raising the roof next week. Honest!