

Earth First!

Action Update

30p

No.44 December July edition 1997

'Drawn by the Cries of the Winged Wild Geese. the Blind Dogs Gaze' Kohjin Sakamoto (and a Partridge in a Pear Tree)

SMASHING GOOD TIME AT DOE HILL!

Friday 31st October was the last day for submissions to the government's "Opencast Coal Review" which has been out for consultation since July. As usual EF! went further than the 'normal' channels for making our views known, deciding that a site occupation would make the point. Well, some of us did - others thought maybe even that wouldn't make our views clear enough...

Some innovative precautions were taken to prevent being tracked, such as wrapping mobile phones in silver foil. Mysteriously, the police didn't seem at all interested. At 6.15am, a coach and 3 vans all arrived at different points of the Doe Hill House opencast mine at Tibshelf, near Chesterfield. It's a site operated by H J Banks, a particularly notorious company, known for their habit of extending sites on which they have planning permission, thus mining much larger areas than they would originally be allowed to. The site at Tibshelf has a rail-head - almost unheard of for opencast sites, and a sign that they're clearly planning to mine that area for a number of years.

As dawn broke, further vehicles arrived from the meeting point in Barnsley. A driver of one of the coaches wasn't too happy with the goings-on of his clients and tried to grass them up to a quarry worker. Unfortunately, he picked a mine-worker who was, in fact, a scout who'd been checking the area for police before our arrival.

The site was overrun in minutes and totally dismantled within an hour. Numerous people displaying vigour not commonly seen at such an early hour. Several lighting rigs were given flying lessons, proving that Newton's First Law is alive

and crashing. Lemmings looked on in interest. According to the police, the damage was estimated at £375,000 and the workers were laid off for a week while equipment was repaired.

As it all happened so quickly...50 people went off to take over the offices of Harry Banks in nearby Chesterfield. Having been persuaded that they'd be able to send a fax to the Department of Environment, Transport and the Region at 2.15, they were all waiting when the cops arrived at 1.50. There were 47 arrests, including a woman with a baby and several people who were only sitting outside. Only 3 people managed to avoid arrest by being in the car park at the time, one of whom had gone out to listen to 'The Archers' in his car. Everyone else's vehicles got impounded - maybe parking in the car park of the offices that were being occupied was not such a good idea.

Everyone was released without charge, some after over 24 hours, and bailed to return in January, except for one bloke who had a warrant out. There was a meeting on 30th Nov for everyone who was arrested and there will be another one on 8th December, probably in Sheffield. Phone Leeds EF! 0113 262 9365



'No Opencast' is a campaign run by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and supported by Women Against Pit Closures and by members of the Miners Support Groups, which did so much for the miners during the strike in the '80s and the pit closures in the '90s. Frustrated by Heseltine's blatant lies and the Tories' open attempts to destroy mineworkers' lives and communities, and by the more-than-usually loaded planning process, they decided to take more radical action. Contact 0171 603 1831.

GANDALF GETS THREE YEARS...

On Thursday 13th November the GANDALF trial resulted in 3 editors of 'Green Anarchist' magazine each being sentenced to 3 years imprisonment. The State had brought charges against the editors of Green Anarchist and the Animal Liberation Front Supporters Group Newsletter (hence 'GA and ALF') for 'conspiracy to incite persons unknown to commit criminal damage'. one ALFSG newsletter editor was found 'not guilty' and other defendants will be tried at a later date. An appeal is being prepared.

The 3 convicted defendants had merely been publishing news of a wide range of current direct action (in the UK and in other countries) by progressive and alternative activists. The court had found this to be 'incitement': simply reporting direct action news or discussing political questions around it in abstract are now crimes, punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment. Passing sentence, Judge David Selwood claimed, "Those who incite such actions and who hope such actions will increase and proliferate are, at least in my view, as guilty as those who take part in violent direct action".

Freedom of expression, association and lifestyle are supposedly guaranteed by the UN Charter but the way the conspiracy/incitement laws have been used in the GANDALF case has demonstrated how easily these rights are violated in the UK.

In the wake of the trial Green Anarchist is being published as usual and some 40 alternative publications have signed up in support of Green Anarchist and carried statements condemning the GANDALF prosecution. A statement of solidarity signed by over 150 publications and individuals pointed out that, "Without a fearless and free press there can be no informed discussion and participation in public life...It is not the reporting of direct action which incites further direct action; environmental degradation, animal abuse, economic injustice, attacks on freedom, weapons exports, nuclear weapons, lack of democratic process - these, among many others, are the inciting factors."

A public organising meeting has been called by the McLibel Support Campaign and London Greenpeace for all those who wish to help defend and support the independent, radical press and to encourage successful, widespread defiance of State censorship; and to free the Gandalf 3. The meeting will take place on Wednesday 17th December, 7pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., WC2 (Holborn tube)

The GANDALF 3 need your letters and support - write to Steve Booth CK4323, Saxon Burchnall-Wood CK4322 and Noel Molland CK4321 at HMP Winchester, Romsey Road SO22 5DF

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Plans are afoot for a **West Country activist gathering** of some shape or form in Bath on the weekend of 17th - 18th January. Things are still very much at the planning stages - whether it's a big DIY conference or a small get together in a hall depends on how many people want to help. Ideas and help to 01225 312688.

Corporate Watch 5 and 6, is out for £2 (£3 if you can afford it). Includes rants, campaign updates, alternative media contacts list and special features on the mainstream media, bananas, the Elstree bypass, oil stuff, the nefarious MAI and loads more.

Three routes have been proposed for a Westbury, **Wiltshire bypass** although there is as yet no focus for a campaign against it. Following successful opposition to the development of the A36, the A350 is now set to be 'improved', damaging stretches of countryside. Contact Hillfort EF! 01249 650078.

Acme Tat Supplies are activists providing climbing and other gear at cost price. Contact Box R, 16 Sholebroke Avenue, Leeds LS7 3HB, Tel: 0113 26 9365, cornerstone@gn.apc.org

This Land is Our Land by Marion Shoard. is a new book looking at land conflict in Britain and challenges the idea that land can ever be wholly the property of its private owners, arguing instead that land must be shared by all. It also looks at the rise of aboriginal land claims in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Available from Gaia Books 0171 323 4010.

BP's 'Tell us what you think' web page has the new title of 'How Can We Help?'. Answers to <http://www.bp.com/cgi-bin/tprep.pl>

Dave Callender, the animal rights activist, recently appealed against a 10 year prison sentence for an action - his sentence was reduced by 2 years, the judge refusing to even consider overturning the conviction. Dave will be eligible for parole next October - in the meantime remember that he is in there for us and we are out here for him and all that jazz and write to Dave Callender, HMP Birmingham, Winsor Green Road, Birmingham B18 4AS.

On 23-25 Feb 1998, 600 representatives from the **People's Global Action against Free Trade and the WTO** will meet in Geneva for the first conference of a new worldwide co-ordination of resistance against the global market and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Contact PlayFair Europe!, Turmstr. 3,52072 Aachen, Germany. Tel +49 241 803792. Email: playfair@asta.rwth-aachen.de

An Oxford student group raised eyebrows by staging a mock marriage outside the University's Earth Science building. Worried that they might actually be quite green - they're also doing research into life on the deep sea bed and global warming - protestors were soon reassured when they arrived and saw the amount of Shell sponsorship. The banner featured a big heart with "Earth Sciences 4 Oil-Wedded to Climate Change".

KINGSTON CAMP

In the latest inner city tree occupation, protestors have taken to the trees in Kingston, west London to try and prevent 56 poplar trees in Canbury Gardens, a public river walk on the side of the Thames, from being felled. A beech and an oak tree at either end of the line of poplars are not threatened; treehouses have been built in them and in three other poplars. Walkways are being constructed between all the poplars and the tree houses at the moment.

The poplar trees stand between a luxury residential development, under construction, and the River Thames. The council agreed to allow the builder to cut down the trees as part of the consent to the original planning application. However, locals knew nothing about this and they were not very happy when they found out that their scenic river walk was going to be spoilt by an ugly encroaching development instead of the ageing but beautiful poplars. The chief planning officer who negotiated the original deal is buying one of the flats in the development!

The next full council meeting is on December 16th. Until then, the Council has stated in writing that it won't evict but the chances of overturning the decision are extremely slim.

The good news is that the builders must get a felling license from the Council before they can even walk onto Canbury Gardens. Also, the Council may be obliged to provide details of the terms of the felling license to interested parties so campaigners might even get to know the exact dates.

Meanwhile Kingston Borough will be pursuing a Summary Possession Order in the High Court on 8th December.

Needed: people, people, people and especially climbers. There is space to camp at the foot of the trees. To get there: Train from Waterloo to Kingston and walk north to Canbury Gardens (1/2 mile) or North London Link to Richmond and cycle south (4 miles) to Canbury Gardens.

Contacts on site mobile 0378 498257. To get on telephone tree: Amanda/Jerry 0181 287 3118

OIL-FREE FUTURE

Reclaim the Streets (RTS) activists occupied a derelict central London petrol station in direct response to the already severely undermined Kyoto climatechange summit that began on Monday 1st. The occupation, known as STRIKE OIL!, was given a rousing send-off on Friday evening by a 350-strong Critical Mass, (complete with pedal-powered sound system.). It was set to last until the next weekend as a car-free, corporate-free, community-friendly zone.

There was a steady stream of activists, kids and locals dropping in throughout the week. Ecotrip and Food Not Bombs provided great food initially, and every weekday saw a vegan Car-Free Commuter Café along with acoustic music and traffic-defying feats. An information stall was set up with practical advice on how to kick our oil habit, and even Bill Clinton, complete with devil's horns, stroled amongst the heavy City Road traffic to distribute Strike Oil! leaflets. Passers-by couldn't fail to notice the banners hung round the three sides of the forecourt roof reading 'DROUGHT, FLOODS, FAMINE, POLLUTION: CORPORATE HELL', 'FOS-SIL-FUELS = CLIMATE CHAOS', and 'SUN, WAVE, WIND, BIKE: CORPORATE-FREE'.

A STRIKE OIL! spokesperson said: 'The Kyoto summit looks like becoming the nadir of human attempts at environmental protection. Yet again world leaders have been bribed and bullied into inaction by corporate interests, leaving nothing but toxic rhetoric. We believe the time has come to free ourselves from the oil industry's stranglehold on our lives. STRIKE OIL! is a step in that direction, a step that is a celebration of community, clean air and a car-free third millennium.'

LORD SIMON TOLD 'NO' TO PATENTS ON LIFE

On Tuesday 25th November Lord Simon, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, Director of RTZ and BP stooge, awoke at his house in London to the sight of 12 "eminent scientists" looking for footholds on his roof and taking samples from his garden plants. "Patent pending" stickers were applied to any interesting bit of living material. As the scientists checked out Lord Simon's back garden for biodiversity, others with banners and megaphones asked him to say 'No' to Patents on Life. Simon was due to approve the EU Life Patents Directive that same week.

The EU Life Patents Directive explicitly allows companies to take out patents on life - genes, cells, whole plants and animals and human body parts. The proposed directive has outraged an unprecedented range of groups - from scientists, Third World development workers, environmentalists, plant and animal breeders, human rights activists, politicians, church leaders and consumer groups. The groups oppose the directive on the grounds that it will give monopoly control to multinationals, commodify life, restrict medical research, extend multinational power over the South's biodiversity and promote genetic engineering. Contact Genetic Engineering Network 0181 374 9516.

NORWEGIAN WHALER SCUTTLED

On November 11, the Morild, the 35 foot whaling vessel owned by a Norwegian parliamentarian and whaler, was sunk in Norway. Activists explained that the ship's sea valve was dismantled and opened and the vessel sunk in several metres of water. Mechanical and electrical damage was extensive.

The Morild is the second whaling ship in 12 days to be scuttled in Norway.

Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Society said that the sinkings are a retaliation for Norwegian contempt for the International Whaling Commission's continued global moratorium on commercial whaling. Norwegian delegates walked out of an IWC meeting in Monaco in October to avoid discussion of their country's illegal whaling activities.

"This arrogance in ignoring the moratorium is being rewarded by a campaign of attacks on Norwegian whalers meant to keep insurance premiums high and to increase security costs for the purpose of impacting the outlaw whaling industry economically," Watson said.

Earlier this year, the Norwegian government stated that protest against Norwegian whaling is dead and that the international public was accepting their whaling activities.

NO SHOP DAY 1997

This year's International No Shop Day saw hundreds of groups across the planet, and around 50 throughout England, Scotland and Wales take part in actions designed to raise the perennial question How Much is Enough? Despite the fact that The Independent took exception to the dangerous idea that we might just maybe, need to reduce our consumption of vast quantities of minerals and raw materials if we're going to have a habitable planet for the future, the Manchester stalwarts took to the streets....

How to Contact the Earth First! Action Update

Post: Earth First! Action Update, Dept 29, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW. Telephone: 0161 224 4846. E-mail: actionupdate@gn.apc.org. Enclose a SAE for replies. Send us your details if you want to subscribe to the free e-mail server. Earth First! Website address: <http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/campaigns/EF/earthfirst.html>

[contd]...A new and alarming 'consumer cult' descended upon unsuspecting shoppers as the city centre echoed to the sounds of satirically intoned advertising slogans: "It's a drivers' car, so drive it", "shop 'til you drop", "Ronald McDonald has time for you". Leaflets invited people to 'join us on our pilgrimage to the sacred temples of spending'. The cult 'members', devotees of the Church of the Rising Profits, were so realistic that shoppers edged away nervously from our leafletters, who had to reassure them that this was, in fact, an event organised as part of No Shop Day.

People on the streets seemed variously amused, confused and sometimes even hostile to this full on attack on consumer culture - so the message was also taken onto T.V., radio and into the newspapers, with extensive coverage and debate throughout all major media.

The basic ideas of anticonsumerism - that buying ever-increasing amounts of consumer tat is not good for the planet, producers in the third world or anyone's sense of contentment - will no doubt resurface next year...so if you want info on all the other events that happened or to organise your own next time, contact Enough on 0161 226 6668.

SIX EAST TIMORESE REFUGEES RELEASED

On the sixth anniversary of the Santa Cruz Massacre in East Timor, where at least 273 demonstrators were gunned down by the Indonesian military in 1991, six Timorese and three Britons entered British Aerospace Warton as part of the ongoing campaign to halt arms sales to Suharto and his regime.

After attempting to bury a child's coffin and commemorating the dead in Timor, the nine were arrested and refused to give their names in solidarity with the nameless dead and disappeared in East Timor. At a later court hearing, Special Branch revealed that Interpol had been asked about the identity of the six, and that they had identified two of them.

A campaigner commented; "The six people, who were on the receiving end of our Hawks and guns, and now here with us in our prisons for an act of nonviolently remembering their dead."

Following 16 days of non co-operation the Timorese walked free as their charges were dropped.

Meanwhile, in East Timor, three women were killed at a demonstration in Dili, also commemorating the Santa Cruz Massacre. Contact 0151 2648741.

HUNTINGDON LIFE SCIENCE CAMPS

The second camp outside Huntingdon Life Science laboratories in Cambridgeshire is still going strong on a field around the back of the lab. They have established a well run community of people who wish to see an end to the cruel experiments carried out by HLS but more people are always needed, and welcome. Contact 0589 026435. There are also still people on the camp outside the HLS laboratories in Wilmslow. Support is needed - contact them on 0958 451525.

RTS OXFORD - A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM LAST TIME

Last years Hallowe'en street party in Oxford attracted over 1,000 people and three police officers. Police liaison prior to the event and the evening timetable led to softly softly policing.

Initial police liaison this year suggested that once again everything would be hunky-dory. Not a bit of it. Sergeant Gardner was over-ruled by his Superintendent, whose real name is Cressida Dick. Over eighty police, half a dozen horses and a helicopter were on site for the early afternoon gathering. Despite many party goers having been turned away before getting to the meeting point, around four hundred people arrived and were faced with two hardened cordons of police clearly intent on nobody going anywhere. Nevertheless, various tense 'negotiations' went on and eventually the entire crowd flowed over on to the Cowley Road and a party ensued. Dick thought she could stop Reclaim the Streets. She was wrong.

There was a slight problem with the sound systems, however. Sgt Gardner said that Rinkydink was perfectly welcome into the party once it became clear that a party was happening, but Rinkydink had already been escorted out of Oxfordshire three hours previously. 'Sparky' - the solar powered backup was safe and well ... in the police station car-park (and was staying there), so the backup arrived in the shape of the Kingston Sound Network. Casey Neill (he of 'dancing on the ruins...') played a superb live set, as did local band Silas and the Lambs. Ecotrip were also on hand to cook and inform; all in all a damned good party.

There have since been all kinds of recriminations between Oxford RTS and the police, mostly on the letters pages of the local newspaper: how horses charged through the kids area and knocked people flying for example. Local Councillors have lodged complaints with the Police Complaints Commission for aggressive police control tactics - so much for community policing. It is obvious that Oxford police blew it big time: they tried to stop a party and couldn't. Funnily enough, it was in almost the same spot as last year, with slightly fewer people and fifty times as many police.

The whole street party was filmed by a BBC documentary crew who should be showing footage on BBC2 at 9.50pm on 21st January.

SHELL ACTION

A group of Glasgow activists decided to take Her Majesty the Queen's lead and pay Shell Oil a visit on its 100th anniversary. As they stupidly forgot the birthday cards and Beaujolais they had to improvise their own celebration. This involved one group D-locking shut the main Shell depot, splattering the premises with red paint and old sump oil and tying timely reminders of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Nigerian activists to the main gate (they were murdered two years and two days prior to Shell's anniversary).

The gate action allowed another group to gain access unnoticed to the top of a storage tanker and unfurl a 40foot 'No blood for oil' banner. The three plucky party-goers were duly arrested, charged with breach of the peace and banned from Shell premises while the gatecrashers, shocked at their poor reception from ungrateful Shell employees, left to find a better party!

EVENTS

DECEMBER

Some time Next convoy of nuclear warheads to Faslane. Contact 01436 820901 to find out more exact dates

5 Picket of Drake's 'Flexploiter and Scab recruiter' in support of Liverpool Dockers. 12.30 - 2pm. (Drake's were used to recruit while the dockers were on strike) Drake International, Charles House, 5 Regent St SW1, near Piccadilly tube station. Picket called by CLAWS (Campaign Linking Against Work Slavery) c/o BM-CRL, London WC1N 3XX.

5 Costain AGM at Novotel London Hammersmith, Hammersmith International Centre, 1 Shortlands, London. Phone Costain 0171 705 8444

6 Candlelit vigil outside the US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, organised by Green Student Network & Students for Environmental Action. 'A fun night with speakers and surprises.' Contact: 01/1 729 1284

7 Actions to mark invasion of East Timor. Contact 0151 264 8741 or 0161 834 0295

13 Manchester solidarity action with Liverpool Dockers. Contact Manchester EF! 0161 224 4846

7-14 A SEED Europe ELECTROLUX Activist Gathering. Workshops on strategies for activism against modern biotechnologies, transport and forest destruction; globalising forces such as the EU and the World Trade Organisation. Contact A SEED Europe, PO Box 92066, 1090 AB Amsterdam, Netherlands, + 31-20-6682236

14-21 International Revolution Week. Imagine the revolution has happened! What will you do with no supermarkets, electricity, water, etc. There's no newspapers, TV and limited radio. Try it out - are you ready for it?

17 Public organising meeting to support radical press; encourage defiance of censorship; and free the GANDALF 3. 7pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London (Holborn Tube). Contact McLibel 0171 713 1269

20 Anti consumerist action in Oldham's shopping centres. Contact Oldham EF! 0161 628 5128

20-21 Faslane Peace Camp. Midwinter Merriment - a weekend of resistance, music and action. Contact 01436 820901

21 Solstice party at the Wilmslow camp outside Huntingdon Life Science lab in Wilmslow. Contact 0958 451525

JANUARY

17-18 West Country EF! activist gathering. Contact 01225 312688

More things to do

CONSUME CONSUME CONSUME
'Dancing on the Ruins of Multinational Corporations', 'Riff Raff' and others of your favourite Casey Neill tunes are available from the EF! AU on tapes (£5) and CD (£8) + £1 postage. Make cheques payable to Earth First!. All profits from the sale will go to the Action Update. 0161 224 4846

Inverness John is on remand for Manchester airport charges. Letters welcome! John Davies, CH 4539, I-wing 4-28, HMP Liverpool, Hornby, Liverpool, L9 3DF

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1997 BILLBOARD BLACKOUT CHAMPIONSHIPS

UK plc had the good fortune of being selected to host the world's first ever Billboard Blackout Championships in the week leading up to this year's No Shop Day. Subverters deleted brand names and crass corporate images from billboards nationally to create Ad Free Zones. Teams were invited to enter for this 'full-on, full-frontal attack on planet trashing consumerism', with a suggestion that they divide up their town or city between teams. Entries included blacked out writing on adverts and subvertised slogans. The closing date for the competition is undisclosed.

NUCLEAR NEWS

Faslane Trident campaigners started the month by twice stopping a nuclear convoy carrying eight warheads. In Rhu ten people jumped over a graveyard wall and hurled themselves in front of the lorries. Two D-locked on underneath and one protestor climbed on top of the carrier. The convoy was held up for thirty minutes and four people got arrested. Later on in Whistlefield there were banners, paintbombs and three more arrests. One protestor was tackled to the ground, having his glasses smashed and was refused access to a doctor for his wounds.

RECLAIM THE STREETS GOES GLOBAL

Road rage became road rave across the globe as major streets in Australia, France and Berlin were reclaimed on the same date as the Oxford event. The Sydney street party was the first of its kind in Australia and was a major celebration while in Lyons, France, a few hundred people donned black garb and processed through the streets. They sang funeral dirges and dragged a shrouded car with Death on top, who sliced the air with her scythe. "L'auto, c'est la mort" (the car is death) and "L'auto, ca pue, ca tue et ca pollue" (the car, it stinks, kills and pollutes) they solemnly sang.

The procession stopped at a busy road with narrow pavements crammed with people and undercover cops were powerless to prevent the dead car being dragged across the street. A tripod was set up at the other end, and bar the black and red ketchup-splattered people dead on the road, a festive atmosphere ensued, with acoustic music, bunting, stilts, leaflets, paint-stencilled symbols and flowers. For Lyons RTS contact Collectif pour des Rues Liberes +33-4-72.00.23.57 <rghent@humboldt1.com>

BARRY HORNE TO APPEAL

On 12th November, after a 10 day trial, a jury found Barry Horne guilty of six charges of arson and attempted arson on the Isle of Wight in 1994. Sentence has been adjourned until Friday 5th December for pre-sentence reports.

Barry had pleaded guilty to attempted arson in Bristol in 1996 but the prosecution case was that the devices were so similar to those used in the Isle of Wight attacks that the same person was responsible for both. Both the judge and the prosecution accepted that all the evidence linking the two attacks was circumstantial; there was no fingerprint or any other forensic evidence; a photofit picture released shortly after the Isle of Wight attacks bore no resemblance to Barry; and fourteen eye-witnesses failed to pick out Barry on ID parades. Despite all this the judge stated that there was an abundance of evidence.

After the verdict Barry's lawyer immediately announced that he would be appealing, mainly on the grounds that the judge misdirected the jury on some crucial points. Barry's sentencing will take place at Bristol Crown Court on Friday 5th December. Contact the Barry Horne Support Campaign 0976 200724

Stop Press Bary Horne got 18 years.

GREENPEACE OCCUPIES SHIPMENT OF GENETIC SOYA

Earlier this month Greenpeace occupied a shipment of genetically engineered soya at the ADM (Archers Daniels Midlands) terminal at Rotterdam in the Netherlands, as part of a new Genetic Hazard Patrol of Europe.

To alert the public to this contamination of their food supply Greenpeace Genetic Hazard Patrols will target shipments of genetically altered soya and maize coming from the US into the European Union. This year's US soya harvest is 15% of the total crop, in 1996 it was only 1-2%. Soya beans are used in about 60 percent of processed food products sold in supermarkets. Contact Genetic Engineering Network 0181 374 9516.

ACTIVISTS' EXCHANGE WITH PENNSYLVANIA?

A Pennsylvania project known as the Allegheny Defence Project (ADP) is interested in doing an activists' exchange with a UK group. The ADP describes itself as "a bio-regional organisation dedicated to finding community-based solutions for restoring the ecological integrity and building sustainable economies benefiting the health of all forest communities on the Allegheny National

Forest". Phew. They deal mostly with the US Forest Service's management and international timber baron's clearcutting of US National Forests. The nature and content of the exchange would be up to those taking part. Contact Philadelphia ADP contact, 1227 Heather Road, Ambler, Pa 19002, USA (814) 226 4918, adp@envirolink.org

HAPPY CAMPING ON BIRMINGHAM NORTHERN RELIEF ROAD ROUTE

A camp has been set up on the route of the proposed Birmingham Northern Relief Road. The new residents describe it as principally a starter site to introduce people already involved in the campaign to nonviolent direct action and to inform others. Although construction isn't due to start for about 14 months, hopes to raise the political and financial profile of the campaign have already paid off. Since the camp was set up the campaign has been in local or national media every day. To date the site features a couple of treehouses and a roundhouse which acts as an information centre, "the nicest yet" according to its creators.

The 27 miles long, 6 lane-wide Birmingham Northern Relief Road will be Britain's first privately owned toll motorway although research has already suggested that the road will not be economically viable. The Department of Transport's own figures predict that the road will actually increase congestion northwards on the M6 by 40%. The Highways Agency are therefore planning to spend £415 million of public money on widening the M6 to cope with the extra traffic, all part of the London to Manchester superhighway and Euroroute to Dublin.

Despite winter's icy blasts spirits remain high and others are welcome to join, "If you're feeling adventurous or just very, very bored then perhaps you'd like to come and spend a while on site. Experience the thrill of living in the trees, the excitement of cooking over an open fire, the intellectually stimulating conversations about whether humus is better than cheese..." They also promise not to sing Bob Dylan songs but there are no tin whistles nailed to posts as yet. For directions and further info contact 0797 0301978.



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The Multilateral Agreement Investment

(The following is adapted from an article in Winter 97 Corporate Watch)

The proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) is the latest step in the globalisation of the world economy. It is the invention of the OECD which provides research and analysis on economic conditions in order to assist its members' development. It is less well known for its role in setting rules and regulations.

The MAI will be a treaty between signatory nations that will signal a further opening up of markets. It provides a single predictable set of rules to replace the myriad bi-lateral agreements between countries and as such will replace all previous agreements that have been made between signatory states and will over-rule all laws that conflict with it. It enshrines the right to own or acquire any asset; related rights such as the ability to operate a business; and the freedom to transfer funds and capital as and when desired. The only economic sector exempted from the scope of the agreement is defence.

The stated intention is innocent-sounding enough: to level the playing field for all investors so that all parties be they small local companies or giant transnationals will be treated equally regardless of nationality. The bulk of the MAI is devoted to specific ways of preventing discrimination. Any and all performance requirements on investors will be banned. Under the terms of the agreement kinds of obligations on investors (amongst others) which are specifically outlawed include prescribed levels of export of goods even though a nation's balance of payments may suffer; setting required levels of domestic content in the products of an enterprise; the transfer of technology or other proprietary knowledge to the local community; requiring that enterprises must be joint ventures with local partners; to achieve a given level or value of production, investment, manufacturing, sales, employment or R&D within a nation's territory.

In short, none of the obligations that are traditionally used to protect and manage local economies may be placed on an investor. Furthermore governments will be barred from interfering with companies because of the nature of their operations elsewhere in the world. If a company exploits slave labour in Burma no government may take this as grounds to hinder or in any way interfere with their free entry into a market.

TNCs will be free to bring into a country the personnel they choose. Obligations will also be included that will require the remuneration of investors in the event of their assets being expropriated or interfered with.

Much of the document comprises a long list of prohibitions, imposing limitations on the power of central and regional government to regulate the actions of business: the MAI goes a great deal further than previous treaties which have maintained the sovereignty of national governments to manage their own economies in line with their development objectives. Yet there are further provisions giving even greater power to investors.

A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR TRANSNATIONALS

The MAI grants investors the right to directly challenge national and local laws when they are deemed to be in breach of MAI provisions, and cause, or are likely to cause loss or damage to an investor or investment. This may lead to absurd situations of cash-strapped local government being vulnerable to legal action directly from TNCs which have far greater resources.

Rules are provided for settling government-to-government disputes and for investor-to-government disputes. No reciprocal mechanism is provided for taking legal action against TNCs, a point that has been made much of by campaigners against the agreement. The reason for this is very simple. There is nothing in the agreement that an investor could be found in breach of. The MAI constitutes a bill of rights for transnational investors, but whilst it bestows new rights and freedoms on investors there are no responsibilities or obligations placed upon them.

Further sections of the agreement provide for a 'rollback' of existing legislation that conflicts with the MAI and a 'standstill' mechanism preventing the enactment of new legislation.

No nation will be allowed to withdraw from the agreement for at least five years after it is signed. All existing investments will be covered by the full range of protections for a further fifteen years after withdrawal.

How the MAI will work out cannot be precisely predicted. The world has never had such a far reaching agreement before but in every one of the hundred or so cases brought before it in its three years, the WTO has ruled in favour of corporate interests. There is little reason to imagine that MAI procedures will be any less partisan.

OPPOSITION GROWS

So many special exemptions from the scope of the MAI have been filed that the negotiations, due to finish in May 97, have been dramatically slowed. Few governments, except it seems the UK's, are actually daft enough to believe their own rhetoric about free markets. America, the most vocal champion of free trade and yet traditionally the most protectionist of capitalist economies, has produced the longest list of exemptions and has the muscle to insist on them. The UK delegation, by contrast, has now dropped its one proposed exemption of fishing rights.

Worldwide, a coalition of NGOs has formed to try to stop the negotiations and is led in the UK by the World Development Movement, Friends of the Earth, Oxfam and the WWF. Focussing on environmental and labour issues, these groups are highlighting the dangers of deregulation. One of the chief concerns is that as capital is given greater mobility countries are put under pressure to provide the most favourable conditions to investors. Across Europe countries have been dropping corporation tax and deregulating the labour market for years in an effort to attract foreign investment. At the same time there is a tendency for the most polluting and labour intensive industries to shift to countries with lower standards and costs. Exactly the same phenomenon has been occurring within the NAFTA area.

Much of the 'developing' world is expressing deep concern about the OECD's plans. Their fear is that the MAI will not stay within the OECD nations, but will form the basis for a global agreement. Also developing nations will be under pressure to sign up to the MAI on a take it or leave it basis, without having had any input into its design. If they do not sign up investment can simply go elsewhere.

THE CAMPAIGN

In October this year the NGO coalition returned to Paris to consult with the OECD. The group of NGOs, 29 strong, issued an ultimatum. If their list of eight demands was not met in full they would devote their combined resources to campaigning against the MAI. Their demands included the immediate halting of negotiations, independent assessments of likely environmental and social impacts, and the incorporation of binding regulations on multinational investors. They were ignored.

FAILURE OF GLOBAL REGULATION

After intense lobbying by the NGOs the British government is now pushing to have the OECD's 'Guidelines For Multinational Enterprises' closely associated with the MAI. Unfortunately the guidelines are purely voluntary and non-binding. There are no binding international regulations in effect today that impose obligations or responsibilities on the multinationals. At a global level there are still no guidelines, even voluntary ones, regarding the conduct of TNCs.

THE POST DEMOCRATIC WORLD

If enacted, the MAI will inevitably spell further degradation of environments and societies, by further deregulating the activities of TNCs. It will also increase the power of the corporations at the expense of elected governments. For national governments to sign away their own power seems, at first, highly unlikely. On the other hand, perhaps it betrays the true nature of the relationship between government and industry in the rich nations. Could this be why there has been no public consultation?

Negotiations at the OECD began in 1995 and were intended to conclude in May 1997. Throughout they were conducted in absolute secrecy with minimal media coverage. It was only in late 1996 after leaked drafts of the report were published on the internet that the NGOs were allowed consultations with the OECD. The CBI however, which is affiliated to the Business and Industry Advisory Council - the OECD's business lobby - reports that industry groups have been actively involved in lobbying for such an agreement since the early '90s.

It seems reasonable to conclude that in the quest to create what one OECD spokesperson describes as "the constitution of a single global economy" democracy has become an expendable notion.

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WHAT IS EARTH FIRST!?

Earth First! is not a cohesive group or a campaign but a convenient banner for people who share similar philosophies to work under. The general principles behind the name are non-hierarchical organisation and the use of direct action to confront, stop, and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and it's inhabitants. The above contacts are autonomous groups that consider themselves to share these principles. International contacts are entry points into that country's own network of groups. Other contacts are ones whose aims and principles are ones that we agree with fully or in part, or groups that we think may be of use or interest to people.

New additions or alterations are shown in bold.