

Corporate Watch

Newsletter 18 : March/April 2004 : £1

www.corporatewatch.org.uk

VICTORY!

It was worldwide news. 'Bayer halts GM maize' reported the Washington Times. 'GM food crops get taken off the menu' trumpeted The Australian. 'Independent on Sunday hastens end of GM crops in Britain' announced the Independent on Sunday. On the last day of March 2004, Bayer Cropscience finally gave up their plans for the UK. Campaigner and writer JIM THOMAS tells the real story behind the headlines.

Once in a while we actually win. The PR machine fails, the people say no, direct action stops things. The best laid plans of corporations and politicians go awry, corporate schemes are thwarted or frustrated - and GM crops fail to be planted. On the last day of March 2004, Bayer Cropscience quietly let it be known that they would not commercialise the only strain of GM seeds that could be expected to get official clearance in the foreseeable future. Campaigners, holding their breath, wondered if it was an April fool. It wasn't. On what felt like the first day of spring, we discovered that no GM crops would be grown commercially in the UK for at least the next 4 to 5 years. If ever.

Here is the magnitude of that victory:

At the end of 1996 (when I started working on GM crops) we were reckoned to be barely a year away from widespread cultivation (GM rape at that time) all across the UK countryside. Monsanto, not yet a household name, were considering the world's largest corporate merger with American Home Products to dominate the new life sciences sector. Sixty percent of processed food was becoming contaminated with GM soy - an unlabelled, untested and underhand experiment on us all. Most people had never heard of the GM food they were unwittingly eating.

In the intervening eight years some of the world's most powerful companies and one of the world's most important governments remained steadfastly determined to get GM crops grown commercially in the UK. And yet, raw, direct, popular opposition managed to:

- remove GM ingredients from all human foods sold in the UK.
- remove GM ingredients from pretty much

all poultry and pig feed in the UK.

- reduce the number of UK GM crop field trials from hundreds of locations per year to currently one.
- cause Monsanto to leave the UK, stopping further breeding work here.
- reduce the number of GM varieties seeking government approval from almost sixty varieties down to a remaining two that have no chance of being legally grown.
- acted as a catalyst, inspiring campaigners and activists to challenge GM crops around the world.

The GM maize that Bayer have now abandoned (called Chardon LL) is the same variety that Greenpeace pulled up in a field in Norfolk and that grassroots activists in Devon were charged with £650,000 worth of criminal damage for decontaminating. It was the only thin grasping straw the agrobiotech industry had for actually growing GM crops legally in the UK countryside in the foreseeable future. Imported GM animal feed is still being fed to dairy cattle and other parts of the world are still suffering the onslaught of the biotech bullies. But, by dropping Chardon LL, Bayer and their companions are basically waving goodbye to growing GM in this peculiar, rainy island off the north coast of Europe for many years to come.

Campaigners rarely get the satisfaction of so clearly winning - a win for the thousands and thousands of people who spent cold nights pulling up crops, long weekends talking to shoppers and farmers and years of emotional and intellectual energy countering the bullying, lobbying power and financial clout of the gene giants. We are all blown away. It's a bright March morning, the buds are out and finally spring has come. Well done, every one of us.



But it's not over yet!

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Disclaimer: The objectivity of the media is generally an illusion. Corporate Watch freely acknowledges that it comes from an anti-corporate perspective. It attempts at all times to be factual, accurate, honest and truthful in its reporting. Any comments or corrections should be sent to the Editor, 16b Cherwell St, Oxford OX4 1BG.

Corporate Watch itself is an independently funded, non-hierarchical workers' collective. If you would like to help with fund-raising, distribution, research or funding please feel free to contact us.

Corporate Watch also works as an independent research unit, conducting research for campaigners, linking corporate activity to wider global issues.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper by Oxford GreenPrint, 115 Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RQ
www.oxfordgreenprint.co.uk mail@oxfordgreenprint.co.uk
@nticopyright to non-profit organisations fighting corporate dominance. ISSN 1470 5842

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SUBVERT OF THE MONTH



From graphicATTACK, resistance by subversion, <http://web.onetel.net.uk/~jeffbr/subverts.htm>

Diary

APRIL

30- May 2 People against civilisation gathering: towards an anticivilisation network. Catalunya, Spain
lavorda@anarchie.net

30-2 Lancashire Reclaim Mayday Roadshow - lots happening over the weekend in Lancaster - for more details <http://mysite.freemove.com/LancashireSF/index.jhtml>

MAY

1 Mayday in Dublin. Join the anti-EU festivities on the the streets of Dublin, Ireland . Reclaim The Street parties blockades and more. For info on getting to and staying in Dublin, go to www.geocities.com/eufortress

1 MayDay Picnic pm St. James Park
www.ourmayday.org.uk

8 The 6th Annual Cannabis March & Festival - London. Carnival style march from Kennington Park (assemble 12pm) leading to an all day free festival in Brockwell Park, Brixton. www.thecannabisfestival.co.uk

8 North West Vegan Festival,Sachas Hotel, Tib Street, Manchester 0845 458 0146
www.veganfestivals.org.uk

8-9 Green Futures - a festival of environmental science and art. Talamh Life Centre, Scotland. 01555 820880
www.talamhlifecentre.org.uk

14-16 Introduction to Renewable Energy Weekend Courses, Wales. Courses at the Centre of Continuing Education, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.
www.greendragonenergy.co.uk

15 Scientists for Global Responsibility Conference: University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1. Excellent group, excellent topics (including sustainable energy and real choices) www.sgr.org.uk

15 Kyoto March. Starting 7am at Exxon-Mobil HQ, near Leatherhead, Surrey, 20 miles to the US embassy, central London. 3.30 pm Rally at the Imperial War Museum. 5.30pm 'DINOSAUR PARTY' at the US Embassy. Campaign against Climate Change
www.campaignccc.org

22 Annual Global Boycott of Proctor & Gamble. Poisoning & maiming animals simply isn't on. Get involved in any way you can, see www.uncaged.co.uk

22-23 Genespotting weekend www.aseed.net

27- 1 June Trident Ploughshares Peace & Disarmament Camp. In Devonport Plymouth, where up to ten nuclear subs are berthed, and the four Trident nuclear-armed subs take it in turns to undergo servicing. Info: 0845 4588363
www.tridentploughshares.org

JUNE

3-6 Permaculture woodland gathering, Hill Holt Wood, Lincolnshire.
www.permaculture.org.uk/woodland

8 Nonviolent Communication for Campaigners, Euston, London 9.30am -5pm
Booking essential slovak@despammed.com
www.CourageousCommunication.com

26 - 4 July - The Occupation isn't Ending
A week of protests, non-violent direct action & occupations. Nonviolent occupations of a relevant space are especially encouraged. Voices in the Wilderness UK
voices@viwuk.freemove.co.uk
www.voicesuk.org. Tel: 0845 458 2564

Clear Channel killed the Radio Star

*What's on the radio,
propoganda, mind control
And turnin it on is like
puttin on a blindfold
Turn off the radio!
Turn off that bullshit!
Turn off the radio! Turn
off that bullshit!*

**Dead Prez,
Turn Off the Radio**

As Tony Blair instigates deregulation of the UK radio market, corporates are preparing to take over. The most notorious, and most likely to succeed in the UK market, is US conglomerate Clear Channel. But the most informative website on the corporation - the long running, obviously anti 'Clear Channel Sucks' - has mysteriously disappeared from the net. Corporate Watch takes up the challenge. Just what will you be listening to? By Jonathan Atkinson

Background

Clear Channel Entertainment already have over 1,000,000,000 listeners worldwide - that's a sixth of the world's population. In the US, they have an audience of 103,000,000. Clear Channel US (aka SFX, one of their more well-known subsidiaries) owns and operates over 200 venues across the country. They are in 248 of the top 250 radio markets, controlling 60% of all rock programming. They outright own the tours of musicians like Janet Jackson, Aerosmith, Pearl Jam, Madonna and N'Sync. They own the network which airs Rush Limbaugh, Dr. Laura, Casey Kasem, and the Fox Sports Radio Network, and which used to air Howard Stern.

Big mouth strikes again

Few Corporate Watch readers will have shed a tear at the news that infamous conservative radio DJ Howard Stern had been sacked. In the USA Stern was a hero to the right. He used his weekly radio phone in show to air his outspoken views on Clear Channel-owned radio stations across the country. He made it cool to be Republican, expressing politically right-wing, libertarian views on taxes, the economy and foreign policy while being culturally liberal in terms of sexual content and music choice. But on February 26th 2004 the company pulled the plug on Stern and his show

The official explanation from Clear Channel was that Stern had allowed indecent material to be broadcast on his show. However, Stern's notoriety stems from his risqué content, so to sack him on such grounds seems peculiar. Stern himself had another explanation. 'There's a real good argument to be made that I

stopped backing Bush and that's when I got kicked off Clear Channel,' he said. Although traditionally conservative, in recent months Stern remarked Bush didn't know what he was doing in Iraq. He made references to Al Gore winning the 2000 election and Bush's draft dodging past while generally questioning Bush's character. Stern dubbed Clear Channel 'Fear Channel,' and warned that the 'fascist right-wing' is 'getting so much power.'¹

So just what kind of a company is Clear Channel and what is behind its 'moral crusade' to eliminate indecency?

Clear Channel

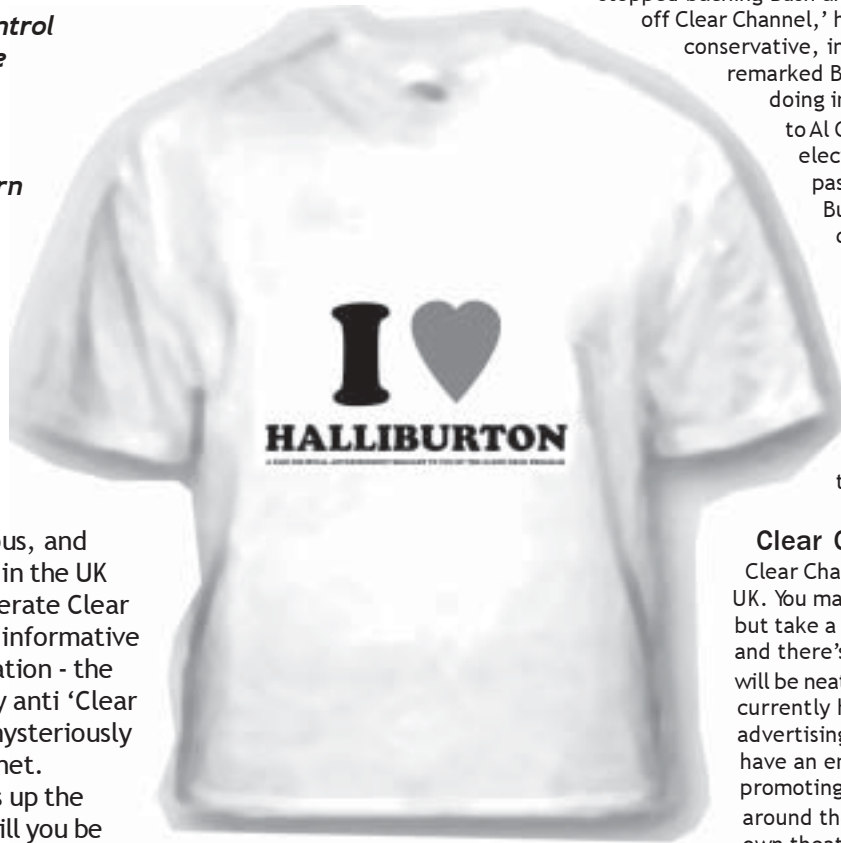
Clear Channel is relatively new to the UK. You may not have heard the name but take a look at the average billboard and there's a good chance their logo will be neatly displayed below. They currently have around 11,000 advertising sites countrywide. They have an entertainment branch promoting gigs and West End shows around the country.² And they also own theatres, including the Oxford Apollo.

It is in the United States that the Clear Channel ranks as one of the country's biggest media outlets. It is the number one radio station owner in the US with 10% of the stations and 25% of the audience, with advertising revenue coming in at a cool \$16 billion in 2001. The company owns or manages 39 US TV stations, has over half a million billboards and its concerts, touring shows, and sports events are attended by 66 million people annually.³ For the average middle American the company's domination of the mental environment is staggering. On the drive home they will pass the company's billboards while listening to a Clear Channel syndicated (probably right-wing) talk show on the car stereo. They'll then eat dinner in front of a Clear Channel TV station before taking in a Clear Channel promoted Broadway show

Clear Channel and Bush

The Stern incident part of a bigger picture that links the agenda of the Bush White House with increasing domination of the mainstream media by corporations. Clear Channel's close links to Bush and the Republicans reveal a strong company ethos. A quick scan at the OpenSecrets.org political donations website shows Clear Channel were the top contributor of TV and radio stations in the 2004 cycle, donating around a quarter of a million dollars to Republican causes.⁴ It's no coincidence that Clear Channel executives Tom Hicks and L. Lowry Mays have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to Bush's presidential campaign coffers.

Hicks, formerly of Hicks, Muse, Tate & Furst, has had a number of past business dealings with Bush and his 1998 buyout of the Texas Rangers football team helped Bush make his fortune. Hicks had in turn profited financially as a result of Bush's decisions while governor of Texas.⁵



Pro-War agenda

Clear Channel is an enthusiastic supporter of military action. In 2002, it gave \$420,000 to the United Service Organizations 'in recognition of the sacrifices made by the men and women in the armed forces'.⁶ Last year, as anti-war feelings ran high, radio talk show host DJ Glenn Beck instigated a series of pro-war marches under the banner of 'Rally for America'.^{*} Though small in comparison to anti-war demonstrations the rallies drew plenty of press headlines with their chest beating patriotism and fierce support of the troops. Beck, naturally enough, is employed by Clear Channel Communications and the rallies were promoted and in part funded by the company and its nationwide network of radio stations.

Turn off the radio! Turn off that bullshit!

The pro-war agenda even extended to music playlist policy. After September 11th 2001 Clear Channel issued a list of 150 songs to its member stations that it deemed too sensitive to play. The list included an odd mix of songs from the tunes of political rock group Rage Against the Machine to Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and John Lennon's *Imagine*. To many it seemed an



Pictures from Clear Channel-promoted pro-war rallies

excuse to shift towards more jingoistic reactionary content. One month later, the Clear Channel-owned radio station KMEL in San Francisco fired its director, David 'Davey D' Cook, shortly after his show aired the anti-war views of Congress member Barbara Lee and rapper Boots Riley of the Coup. The station claimed it did so for financial reasons.

When the Dixie Chicks suggested on a London stage in 2003 that they might be ashamed the president of the United States was from Texas it triggered a backlash in the States. Clear Channel were at the forefront and fired two DJs at country radio station KKCS who dared to break the ban.⁷

Clear Channel Clear Up

In February of this year, Clear Channel sought to tighten its grip on output and shift its content to the right when it announced what can only be described as a moral crusade. It vowed to 'fight the rising tide of indecency on the airwaves' and adopt what Chief operating officer Mark Mays described as a 'zero tolerance' policy for 'indecent' content.

DJs now face suspension or dismissal for broadcast of 'obscene material' and if that doesn't scare them enough they now have clauses written into their contracts making them financially liable for any repercussions from such material. Howard Stern was the first official victim of that policy.

MegaMediaConglomeration

The shift in content coincides with a gradual conglomeration of the broadcasting industry. The 1996 Telecommunications Act enabled Clear Channel to go from owning 36 radio stations (four less than the former legal limit) to becoming the largest radio station owner in the United States. Now it owns more than 1,200 radio stations, and there are 30 percent fewer station owners than there were before 1996. The FCC (Federal Communications Commission), the telecommunications regulator whose chairman is Michael Powell (son of Colin Powell) have instigated a bill further relaxing media ownership regulations.⁷ Again the Bush Administration has come good for the corporate media and Clear Channel seem set to profit handsomely.⁷

What is to come...

So Stern departs while others remain - such as fellow Clear Channel disc jockey Bill Handel who aired a skit in which make-believe Muslims made remarks suggesting Muslims engage in sex with animals and are obsessed with killing Jews.

And over here...

In the UK, Clear Channel stand ready to take over. Already they've been linked to takeovers at Classic FM and Capital Radio as well as other names like Century and BRMB.⁸ Fears are also that Clear Channel are set to acquire hundreds of local independent radio stations across the country, making them anything but.

The crusade has begun and its heading our way. Welcome to a world where the music you listen to, the views you here and even the wars you fight are brought to you courtesy of Clear Channel Communications.

^{*} Beck achieved the remarkable feat of showing that marches can actually be effective in influencing politicians - something a million anti-war marchers in the UK aren't privileged enough to be able to boast.

1. Buzzflash.com, As the Worm Turns: Stern, Sully and the Bush Backlash, <http://www.buzzflash.com/farrell/04/03/far04006.html>, March 2, 2004
2. Clear Channel UK website, <http://www.clearchannel.co.uk/>, viewed 19.3.04
3. Clear Channel website <http://www.clearchannel.com>, viewed 19.3.04
4. Open Secrets, Top Contributors, Republican Party (2004 election cycle) <http://www.opensecrets.org/parties/contrib.asp?Cmte=RPC>
5. One Thing is Crystal Clear: Clear Channel is a Subsidiary of Bush, http://www.buzzflash.com/analysis/03/04/18_clear.html, April 18, 2003
6. The USO Receives Donation from Clear Channel Worldwide, http://www.uso.org/pubs/prarchives/PF_17_517_1905.cfm
7. Buzzflash.com, April 18, 2003, One Thing is Crystal Clear: Clear Channel is a Subsidiary of Bush, Inc, http://www.buzzflash.com/analysis/03/04/18_clear.html
8. BBC News website, Q&A: US media changes and the UK, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/2957534.stm, Monday, 2 June, 2003

AND NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS

Generally, European law is agreed to be about as interesting as watching paint dry. Specific European laws are usually perceived to be even more dull; like watching dry paint. But this is a sad, possibly even deliberately designed, state of affairs. Approach European law with a different attitude, and you find deals which wouldn't look out of place in a Mafia social club; together with a totalitarian master plan of such dazzling brilliance (or imbecility, depending on how you look at it) that it makes the average Bond villain look like a rank amateur with an attitude problem.

Consider the latest piece of legislation on the table: the European Directive on Services, due to become law in 2007. Overall, according to the European Commission, the Directive will achieve 'a genuine Internal Market in services *by removing legal and administrative barriers* to the development of service activities between Member States...When service providers from one Member State wish to establish themselves in another Member State...or wish to provide a service from their Member State of Origin into another Member State...the proposed Directive would guarantee service providers the legal certainty they need in order to exercise in practice *these two fundamental freedoms enshrined in the EC treaty*'.

European Commission document 13/1/04
(italics by Corporate Watch)

The European Commission has helpfully provided a document answering 'frequently asked questions' about the Directive - despite the fact that most people haven't even heard about it. 'Is such a broad initiative not too ambitious?' it asks itself. Well, yes. But it will be 'for the mutual benefit of all'. So that's all right, then.

In fact, the Directive on Services admits it was designed solely to give businesses the 'large scale administrative simplification they asked for'. In practice, this means opening up the oyster of European countries to just about any multinational with a desire to expand, ie all of them. And never mind the centuries which have gone into developing legal protection for citizens (or 'service users' in EC terms) against the overriding interests of unscrupulous companies.

According to the Commission's more detailed answers:

- Countries will have to abolish restrictions under which new businesses can only enter markets if demand is unsatisfied by existing operators. Instead, a 'different list of restrictions' are proposed, such as the 'requirements limiting the number of outlets per head of population', whatever that might mean. One supermarket for each family?
- There will be a 'systematic screening' of any attempted restrictions.
- Businesses will only be required to respect the rules and regulations of their 'country of establishment' when operating in other countries.
- Bans on multi-disciplinary activities 'would have to be lifted' - for example, the Commission notes approvingly, a ban on supermarkets selling petrol.
- The Directive excludes transport, financial services, and telecommunications, which have their own EU legislation. Covered, however, is just about everything else, from security services and postal services to environmental services and health services - indeed, 'any business activity that constitutes a service'.
- Redress against any provider will have to be in the member state where the provider is registered. People seeking compensation or

redress against a company registered in Lithuania, but operating in the UK, would have to take their case to Lithuania.

- The Commission confidently promises that the proposal will 'increase choice and reduce prices for service users'. However, the same document cheerfully admits that the Commission 'has not made an overall estimate of the economic impact that can be expected because it is not possible to do so with confidence'.

Campaigner and journalist Linda Kaucher believes the Directive to be one of the most frightening pieces of legislation currently to be hanging over the heads of European citizens (or service users). 'All the advantages are to the corporations, and all the limitations on democratically elected governments' she writes. 'Instead of this Directive we need one which prioritises sustainable development. In disallowing regulation this Directive will work against it. It's obviously driven by the Services lobby, made up of the world's biggest corporations seeking unrestricted access to profit from trade in services'.

The Directive is currently going through a 'consultation' process before it becomes law. In the UK, this consultation was launched at a presentation by the Department of Trade and Industry on March 26th. The launch was attended almost solely by business representatives.

'Today, it is above all, the big corporations that seek to destroy social forms and create an atomised mass society made up of egoistic and competitive individuals with no social or ecological obligations of any kind and whose interrelationships are of a strictly economic nature'

Edward Goldsmith, ecologist (www.edwardgoldsmith.com)



NEWS

UK: BULLYING & BRIBERY - THE NEW OLYMPIC GAMES

As London's bid to host the 2012 Olympics steams patriotically ahead, a Corporate Watch investigation has revealed that Ken Livingstone's London Development Agency (LDA) are threatening residents of the proposed Olympic site with Compulsory Purchase Orders if they do not agree to sell their homes and businesses, and relocate to make way for the developers.

At a meeting held last November in Stratford Town Hall, Tony Winterbottom, one of the LDA's directors, confirmed that businesses would be 'encouraged to relocate', but that Compulsory Purchase Orders would be used if necessary. In fact, by his own admission, without the use of CPO's, the LDA would only have half of the land needed to site the Games.

Residents of Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest, which all form part of the Olympic site plan, had been promised that that, should the bid go ahead, their boroughs would benefit from an almost magical transformation. 'London 2012 would be the key catalyst to the most significant urban and environmental regeneration ever seen in London' assures the bid's official site. In fact, London's Joint Planning Authorities Team (JPAT), responsible for overseeing the planning process, has just sent back part of the bid's application, on the grounds that there were 'sixty or seventy issues in the Environmental Statement which needed clarification', according to a JPAT spokesman.

The meeting at Stratford Town Hall disclosed 'widespread unease and frustration' among local people. They are unlikely to be convinced by the finer details behind the official website's grand promises. Benefit no. 3 of staging the Olympics is, according to the website:

'Anecdotally, participation in sport has led to downturns in youth crime'. Leaving the 'anecdotally' aside, it is easy to wonder what kind of participation in sport, precisely. Watching the construction companies as they move in to turn Hackney Marshes - currently a thriving local football venue - into an Olympic coach park, perhaps.

The fact that, as the website points out, the Olympics are proven to be 'a significant boost to the convention industry', is also unlikely to console residents whose homes are under threat, or the local businesses which will supposedly flourish despite being forced to close up and move elsewhere. But there are, certainly, parties who will benefit. The letters of support on the official website tellingly include those from Bechtel, Jarvis, the Bank of Japan and McDonalds. It is, however, the taxpayers who will supply most of the money to host the Games - just as in Athens, where the Games are currently thirty percent over budget, leaving the Greek taxpayers, who have already stumped up £3.3 billion, to find an extra £1.5 billion to support them.

Other concerns with previous Olympics include the fact that in Los Angeles, Atlanta and Seoul, Korea, there was wholesale removal of homeless people and criminalising of poverty to make way for the businesses. In Atlanta, 8000 people were removed from the streets. Community and environmental groups are already making a noise over Vancouver's pursuit to host the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, with critics concerned about the lasting economic, environmental, political and social impacts of doing so. While currently, in New York, a determined coalition of residents and small business owners looks likely to succeed in blocking that city's bid for the 2012 Games. Unless London residents do the same, the way will then be left clear for London and Paris to fight it out between them. Bechtel and Jarvis, however, are certain to win; as are McDonalds, Visa, and CocaCola - just three of the Games' official sponsors.

COLOMBIA: UNIONS WIN AGAINST COKE

Thirty workers had to go on hunger strike for 12 days to do it. But as a result Femsá, Coca Cola's bottling plant in Colombia, finally agreed not to lay off 91 union members slated for unemployment. The company also agreed to give the hunger strikers two weeks paid vacation for 'physical recuperation' and, rather chillingly, to 'purchase a national newspaper advertisement discouraging paramilitary reprisals against them'. Unions and human rights activists around the world had sent protest messages to Coca Cola in Atlanta, and students in a dozen US cities had organised solidarity actions on their behalf.



brand tumor by marko senegac, Slovenia, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of economics; marketing

WORLDWIDE: BOYCOTT

The last few months have seen calls by both Arundhati Roy and Naomi Klein to boycott corporations who have profited from the war on Iraq. Although neither mentioned specific companies, one researcher, Mike Bryan, pointing out that it's difficult for the average person to boycott Halliburton or Bechtel, has suggested General Electric and MCI, both of whom feature in the lucrative series of contracts handed out by the US after the invasion.

The difficulty for British readers is that in the UK, General Electric only publicly sell luxury fridges - 'American refrigerators fast becoming a necessity' as their website helpfully states. The weapons systems they manufacture across the country are obviously reserved for an even more elite market. While MCI, although at one point connected with the internet company 'fish' (as in 'fish4jobs' etc) is a business driven enterprise, rather than an individually funded one.

However, a look at the list of companies 'receiving the largest dollar volume of US Department of Defense prime contract awards' in 2003 reveals a number of possible candidates. Exxon at number 29, Dell Computers at number 35 and Motorola at number 57; for example. Campaigners point out that someone who decides to buy a different mobile phone, for example, should write to Motorola and explain precisely why. (see also the new website www.warprofiteers.com for other insights).

Meanwhile people across the world are invited to participate in the annual Global Boycott Procter & Gamble Day VIII on Saturday 22nd May 2004 - one of the most popular and successful boycott campaigns in the world. And one in which there is a role for everyone - 'from the armchair campaigner to experienced groups of activists'. The campaign is being waged by animal rights group Uncaged due to Procter and Gamble's unrepentant animal testing for new cosmetic and household cleaning and pet food products and chemical ingredients. However Procter & Gamble has also done over \$500 million worth of business with the Pentagon in the past two years, ranking it high on the list of war profiteers. Ideas range from letter writing and raising petitions, to staging town centre campaign stalls and protests at supermarkets and P&G sites. contact: Uncaged Campaigns, 9 Bailey Lane, Sheffield S1 4EG, UK phone +44 (0) 114 272 2220, fax +44 (0) 114 272 2225, email info@uncaged.co.uk



IRAQ: WMD? No Problem!

Anyone cynical enough to wonder why the Bush administration haven't just hidden some weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and then 'discovered' them, might find a report published by the Tehran Times on March 13th interesting. U.S. forces, claimed the newspaper, have unloaded a large cargo of parts for constructing long-range missiles and WMD in the southern ports of Iraq. The newspaper's source (a member of the Iraqi Governing Council) went on to say that the rest of the weapons were probably transferred in vans to an unknown location somewhere in the vicinity of Basra overnight. "Most of these weapons are of Eastern European origin and some parts are from the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The U.S. obtained them through confiscations during sales of banned arms over the past two decades," he said.

The Tehran Times adds that this action comes as certain U.S. and Western officials have been pointing out the fact that no weapons of mass destruction have been discovered in Iraq, and as the issue of Saddam's trial begins to take center stage. In addition, it says, former chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix has emphasized that the U.S. and British intelligence agencies issued false reports on Iraq leading to the U.S. attack. While, it concludes, the suspicious death of weapons inspector David Kelly is also an unresolved issue in Britain.

In response, a security official for the coalition forces in Iraq said that he has not received any information about the unloading of weapons of mass destruction in ports in southern Iraq. CPA spokesman Shane Wolf told the Mehr News Agency that the occupation forces have received no reports on such events, but said he hoped that the coalition forces would find the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction one day.

SPAIN: DAM CRIMINALS

A man has been jailed for over four years for cutting the cables of a concrete pump at the construction site of the infamous Itioz dam in Spain. Ibai Ederra's action had stopped construction for a year. It was part of a twenty year struggle by tens of thousands of people against the dam, which had been declared illegal by Spain's Supreme Court - until the Constitutional Court changed the law specifically for Itioz. Ederra's support group, the Solidarios, are appealing for people to write to him, and another objector, Inaki Garcia, in prison at: Carcel de Pamplona, Apdo 250, Iruna, Nafarroa, Spain.

MOSCOW: PROTEST TO BE BANNED

Last month, protestors gathered outside the State Parliament in Moscow to voice their opposition to a new law which, when passed, will see the criminalising of peaceful protest. The deputy head of the Yabloko Party (equivalent to the Lib Dems) was part of the protest and was arrested. Sergey Mitrohin told the protesters: "We will continue to stage these demonstrations even if they pass this draconian law." A senior member of the Communist faction in the Duma, Sergei Reshulsky, said: "This would be the end of political life in the streets."

US: THE MACHINES KEEP TAKING OVER

American pundits are suggesting that George Bush looks set for another four years in the White House. Certainly, on past evidence, Bush and his cohorts have no trouble with getting White House residency - even if they haven't won an election. Last time, thousands of mainly Democrat voters were illegally removed from US registers, allowing Al Gore to 'lose' the election by 537 votes.

Presumably, the new Republican backed voting machines will make the whole process much easier. The installation of the touch-screen computers, which leave no paper trail, is continuing across the country, with Diebold Election Systems launching a five-year, \$1 million 'outreach campaign' to educate Maryland residents. The campaign, which includes radio and TV commercials, a website, more than 1.5 million brochures, and voting demonstrations, began just prior to Maryland's March 2 primary. "The money would be better spent making the system more secure instead of trying to win voter confidence through public relations," replied Johns Hopkins computer science professor Avi Rubin. A study co-authored by Rubin identified serious security flaws with Diebold machines.

Meanwhile, in San Diego, voters in the March 2nd primary elections there were forced to leave without casting ballots, as Diebold's voting machines crashed yet again. (http://www.mercurynews.com/ml/d/mercurynews/news/breaking_news/8431896.htm?1c). The company blamed a 'faulty power switch'.

CORPORATE POWER V THE PEOPLE: THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA

On April 11 2002, a US supported coup deposed the democratically elected President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez. Two days later, following mass demonstrations in his favour, Chavez was back in power. But the opposition forces (made up largely of Venezuela's rich elite) haven't gone away. DARIO AZZELINI reports.

These days the audience of Venezuela's four most important private TV channels must have the impression that there is a popular revolt against the Chávez government going on. Images of two burning litterbags - or simply some rocks lying around - are supported by dramatic music while aggressive politicians from the opposition talk about 'dictatorship'; and make calls for disobedience. Reporters for 'Globovision' - the 24 hour live channel - are filmed in front of a completely normal city highway; declaring with a certain air of invitation: "The protests here will begin about midday, we're gonna stay here until the blockades start."

On Venevision, also an organ of the coup-friendly sector of the opposition, we can observe messages of supposed calls from the audience on the bottom of the screen: "Out on the streets!" "Fight the dictatorship." "Blockades with any means." "Shame! Nobody can stay at home!" And a hysterical voice declares in a phone call: "People have to wake up! The regime is executing people on the streets all over the country!"

The reality on streets is very different. Several members of the opposition have been arrested during violent acts, while Carlos Melo, a former leader of "Causa R" (CR - Radical Cause), was arrested by the investigative police (DISIP) with two automatic high-powered rifles in his car.

But just as during the 2002 coup attempt, the mass media, controlled by rightwing businessmen, play a central role in the destabilization strategy of the opposition. So the virtual reality of the opposition, which is mainly formed by the same sectors that robbed the country for 40 years, keeping the people in poverty and controlling them with repression, finds an echo in the international mass media.

A documentary about the last coup attempt - "The Revolution will not be Televised" - won several international prizes and was shown all over the western world. In some countries, such as Germany and Britain, it was even shown on public television. Nevertheless, very few journalists seriously thought about the virtual set-up of the coup. The same politicians that participated in the coup are today once again presented as the "democratic opposition" and the same TV channels that helped organize and support the coup are today once again the main source of information for the international press.

The mass media and the US government are following the destabilization script, along with different opposition groups which have no political program apart from getting rid of Chávez. Opposition politicians threaten, via the private TV channels, to create a situation

"like in Haiti." William Lara, member of Venezuela's National Assembly, announced that the ongoing actions correspond to the guidelines of a CIA counter-insurgency handbook.

In the course of several months we have seen an ever-repeating game of public declarations from US government officials. First, an article is published in the US press, citing unnamed or low-profile US government representatives who make declarations about Venezuela's supposed ties to international terrorism - ranging from the Colombian FARC to Al Qaida. This is followed by an official protest from the Venezuelan government and after that a higher-ranking representative of the US administration declares that nothing indicates such ties.

A coup and intervention seem fairly unrealistic at the moment. Apart from all polemics and propaganda, even Washington should be conscious of the enormous support the deep political and social transformations carried out by the Chávez government have. But the fact that the US administration is playing an important role in the script of the destabilization of Venezuela is obvious. Apart from the direct involvement in the April 2002 coup attempt, the US government finances, via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), different opposition organizations. One of them is the private enterprise Sumate, which, in cooperation with various companies, put pressure on thousands of workers to sign against Chávez. Sumate distributed cards confirming the signature against Chávez, while the companies asked their workers for the card - or they would lose their jobs.

We can find other financiers of the script in the European Union. For example, the Spanish government. Or the German Christian-democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which provides economic support to the new party "Primero Justicia" (PJ - Justice First). PJ participated in the coup, and party representatives "arrested" ministers of the Chávez government at that time. Recently, PJ representatives apparently coordinated the attacks and the destruction of a building of Chávez's party, which was set on fire during a so-called "peaceful demonstration" of the opposition on Friday, February 27th. The "peaceful demonstration" also attacked another building of a government-friendly party and open fire on the National Guard.

At the same time, small opposition groups acted violently in different parts of the capital, especially in the wealthy areas of El Hatillo, Baruta and Chacao, setting up road blocks with burning

barricades. The National Guard and Military Police, which tried to disperse the “peaceful demonstrations” were attacked with rocks, Molotov cocktails, and gunfire.

Only a few hundred people participated in these activities, but they can be prevented only with difficulty, since the police force of the capital Caracas (which has a mayor who was elected on the Chavez ticket, but later switched over to the opposition) and of the three above-named districts do not intervene. They either remain out of sight, actively support the violent protesters, or participate in civilian clothes. Several police officers have been arrested by the National Guard.

The police force of the city’s largest district, Libertador, which is governed by a pro-Chavez mayor and which, with its over two million inhabitants, has more inhabitants than all of the other districts put together, is not allowed to be active in the rest of the city. And the

National Guard and the military police are, as long as there is no state of emergency, only allowed to protect the main thoroughfares and city freeways. So as to provide the necessary mood during the demonstrations, the oppositional company Polar, which is the largest beer producer in Venezuela, has been distributing free beer to the “demonstrators.” Also noticeable is that numerous freeway blockages are being organized with Polar trucks. In this way small groups can, at

least in the virtual reality of television, plunge the city into chaos.

An important goal of the street violence is also to provoke reactions among the large masses of people who support the government and to this achieve an armed conflict on the streets and generate the impression of civil war. The government thus constantly issues calls to its supporters to maintain their calm. That the population has so far not fallen into the opposition’s trap probably has to do with the same collective intelligence that already on the second day of the coup managed to mobilize millions of people to chase away the coup government, without the help of a mass media and despite massive repression and 45 deaths.

In some cases members of the opposition have fired shots from buildings and have wounded at least two National Guard soldiers and two journalists. On Tuesday morning two bodies of individuals from the barrios appeared, which showed evidence of having been tortured.

People in the area suspect the metropolitan police to be responsible for the murders. At the same time, the “democratic opposition” appears in the media, saying that the presence of the National Guard and Military Police are proof that Venezuela is a military dictatorship. This is a solid film, in accordance with the script of destabilization, which is being sold with much success to the international media.

**Dario Azzelini is a freelance journalist writing for
www.Venezuelanalysis.com**



UPDATE

Breast Cancer Genes: Patent granted on BRCA2

By Helena Paul

On February 11th, Cancer Research UK announced that it had obtained a European-wide patent on the cancer susceptibility gene, BRCA2. This update aims to provide a context for this development, in order to understand why the patent was sought, the impacts it could have, and how it relates to the three patents granted by the European Patent Office to Myriad Genetics, previously reported by Corporate Watch (see newsletter 17)

A group of scientists at the Institute of Cancer Research did much of the work that led to the discovery of the BRCA2 gene in 1995. Cancer Research UK's commercial subsidiary obtained a UK patent on the discovery. Although patents on discoveries (such as genes) are opposed by many scientists, this patent was taken out with a defensive intention, to keep predatory commercial interests from gaining control over the gene, and to preserve public access to it in the interests of research. The fact that royalty free licences for research will now be granted to public health authorities throughout Europe on BRCA2 is welcome.

However, as previously reported, Myriad Genetics of the US holds patents relating to BRCA2 and another breast cancer gene, BRCA1. These cover diagnosis, diagnostic kits and therapies. This means that, while licences for further research into the BRCA2 gene may be granted freely, Myriad Genetics has control over testing for the gene. Indeed it has refused to grant licences for this purpose, saying that tests should be carried out in its private laboratories in Salt Lake City, Utah, rather than at much lower cost in public health laboratories in Europe. Legal challenges to its patents continue, while public health laboratories in Europe continue to perform tests at the risk of being sued. The new patent is unlikely to change the situation with regard to tests for BRCA2.

Defensive patents demonstrate the problem we face very clearly. Those who oppose patents say that genes and living organisms are discoveries, not inventions and therefore should not be patentable, yet, as in this case, they may feel compelled to take out patents to protect the 'territory' they seek to explore. Indigenous peoples never saw themselves as owning the land, yet felt compelled to claim title to their territories simply because others were taking them over.

In fact, the race to patent human genes closely resembles the rush by colonial powers to build empires in Africa, Asia and South America. Our current economic system functions by creating fresh

new worlds to

'conquer' and then

fighting to carve up and colonise them, a process that may begin with many companies competing for a share and may end with just a few players in what is effectively a cartel. In the case of genetics, the new world is the genome. 'Valuable' genes (with apparently clear applications of interest to industry) are isolated from so-called 'junk DNA' (whose function has not yet been identified), just as valuable ores are separated from dross. These commodities are then controlled for profit, through patents. A large patent portfolio is a valuable boost to a company's shares, because of the potential profits from exploiting the monopolies they confer.

The vast 'new' world of genes is thus full of free-booters seeking profits for their shareholders through taking out patents. In doing so, they are shutting out, or at least obstructing, genuine explorer scientists, who seek to understand rather than take over the territory. This means that immense areas of public interest, such as the human genome, never considered to be available for enclosure or privatisation, are being taken over for private profit through patenting. And the rejoinder that a patent gives no right to exploit and is moreover only granted for a number of years is misleading. A patent's power, like any other form of private property, is based on the ability to exclude others. Patents also tend to push research in directions where profits are likely to accrue rather than where they are not. Limits on the duration of a patent do not prevent this distortion.

So, while the fact that a public institution has obtained a patent on BRCA2 is to be welcomed, simply because it thereby prevents private interests from doing so, it should never have been necessary to spend time and public resources on seeking such a patent in the first place. Patents on genes and living organisms, 'patents on life', should be banned in the public interest.



Main source for the information

Charity wins BRCA2 patent

The Scientist with BioMed Central, February 13th
Charity wins BRCA2 patent
Genetics researchers welcome a decision that will make the gene freely available in Europe | By Susan Mayor
www.biomedcentral.com/news/20040213/02

Links for this article

"Charities to make breast cancer gene (BRCA2) freely available across Europe,"
Cancer Research UK press release, February 11, 2004.
www.cancerresearchuk.org/news/pressreleases

European Patent Office

www.european-patent-office.org/index.en.php

Peter Rigby

<http://enjoy.underwired.com/portfolio/sites/icr/seniorstaff.htm>

Myriad Genetics

www.myriad.com

R. Wooster et al.,

"Identification of the breast-cancer susceptibility gene BRCA2,"
Nature, 378:789-791, December 21-28, 1995. [PubMed Abstract]

Gert Matthijs

<http://cwisdb.cc.kuleuven.ac.be/research/E/expertX3962.htm>

European Society of Human Genetics

www.eshg.org

GeneWatch

www.genewatch.org

UPDATE:

BLACKWOOD - PROTESTS WILL CONTINUE

Corporate Watch continues its report on the fight to save a local woodland in Wales.

After ten years of campaigning and protest, the oldest trees in St David's Wood, Blackwood, were among the last to fall. As the bailiffs moved in to remove the last fifteen or so people trying to save the woodland, both local protestors and supporters were in tears. The ancient silver oak in the final protest camp - gone. The giant, perfect beech which stood alone in the centre of a field - gone. 'That one will definitely stay' a member of Caerphilly Council had promised, just weeks before. Hundreds of other trees, bat residences, dormouse habitats, buzzard roosts - gone. And never mind the legality. Appeals had been put in to stop the eviction of the protestors, and to preserve the dormouse sites (dormice, unlike protestors, being a protected species in the UK). But Costain, the construction company, had gone ahead anyway, presumably reckoning the costs of a fine (in the thousands) against the far higher costs of not completing the work.

But, say locals and supporters, the resistance is not over. The trees may be dead, and the road itself underway, but there is still the question of the two bypasses, which are due to connect to the road. They will be built over the small, hitherto peaceful valley, thereby turning it instantly into a miniature of Spaghetti Junction. Unwanted, unnecessary, destructive to local trade, polluting, hazardous and an eyesore, are how most of the Blackwood locals see the bypasses. Not that this has stopped their local council from going ahead with it. 'It makes you wonder why we vote' said a local mother, angrily. Questions abound about the £54 million in 'regeneration' money this exercise will cost, and why it could not be spent on other, more productive local projects. Rumours are rife about local corruption.

Add to this unease the fact that this whole construction is intended to service two American arms manufacturers - and people are confident that the protests will not die. The people who clung onto the trees may have been pulled down to earth, somewhat battered and exhausted. But that, many say, is not the end of the story. In the meantime, the construction's destruction continues.

NOTE: Behind the road are two corporations already known for being among the most destructive on the planet. On one side of the road is General Electric - chief war profiteer and manufacturer of jet engines. While on the other side, on the estate in Oakdale - is General Dynamics. General Dynamics manufacture, among other things, the charmingly named 'Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems' as well as battle tanks, assault vehicles, nuclear submarines and destroyers.

The General Dynamics UK site boasts of delivering 'world class C4ISTAR capability vital to customer needs'. Officially, C4ISTAR stands for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance. When asked what, precisely, the branch in Wales would be making, an employee replied that he 'wasn't allowed to say'.

Forcing people in areas of low employment into manufacturing weapons of destruction is nothing new, of course, but one wonders how the promised local jobs (which range from hundreds to thousands, depending on the degree of hyperbole) will affect the unskilled teenagers and out of work miners in need of employment.



Construction workers at Blackwood, pictures from IndyMedia

UPDATE: GM TEST SITES

Where have all the test sites gone?

For the first time in over 10 years none of the Gene Giants (Syngenta, Monsanto and Bayer) are conducting any UK field trials of GM crops.

Bayer CropScience halted their UK field trials in autumn 2003 because the government refused to let them conceal the locations. It was expected that Syngenta (working in conjunction with Monsanto) would plant R&D trials of their #77 sugar beet this spring. In 2003 Syngenta notified DEFRA of their test site locations by mid February, but as of early April 2004 no notification of trial locations for this year has been received.

Several GM crops companies have crops with active consents for trials in 2004 but as yet it appears that only one trial notification has been received by DEFRA. This is a research and development trial of GM peas by John Innes Centre in Norwich, (TG 180070). This is the second year of a two year trial. More information on this trial from www.defra.gov.uk/environment/gm/regulation/trials.htm

This year sees a massive reduction in the total number of GM field trials in the UK from a peak of 159 in 2000-2001 to 42 in 2002-2003 to just 1 in 2003-2004.

Year	Total GM field trials
2003-4	1
2002-3	42
2001-2	140
2000-1	159
1999-2000	134

Information taken from:
www.geneticsaction.org.uk/testsites



Babylonian Times

Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Jeremiah 51:6-8

BUSH'S TAX CUTS CUT BUSH'S TAXES

Following implementation of George Bush's new tax policy, Bob McIntyre, director of Citizens for Tax Justice, a liberal advocacy group whose statistical analyses are respected by mainstream economists, analyzed the returns. He found the Bush-backed tax cuts saved the president nearly \$31,000 on his 2003 bill. Dick Cheney, meanwhile, saved \$11,000.

"What can you say? They're rich, so you'd expect them to benefit from a tax cut for the rich," McIntyre said.

SELLEBRITY

As a new book called Celebrity Sells makes clear, it's official - celebrity sells. Readers irritated to fury by the spectacle of Prunella Scales stomping 'amusingly' around Tesco followed by an understandably pained Jane Horrocks might be even more repulsed to know that this one campaign actually earned Tesco an extra £2.2 billion. That's £2.2 billion sucked from the public purse and straight into the Tesco boardroom, where it's used to make thousands of farmers redundant, turn our high streets into ghost streets, exploit undocumented migrant workers and sell, among other things, whale meat. Good choice of employer! Still, it's probably marginally better than working for GM primate experiment sponsoring Sainsbury's - right, Jamie Oliver?

Celebrity Sells (by 'advertising legend' Hamish Pringle) oleagiously boasts that it 'demonstrates the awesome power of famous names'. Even publicist Max Clifford, interviewed on Richard and Judy about the book, looked fairly sick at this unpleasant fact. Happily, the one thing the book doesn't seem to be selling is itself - hardback copies, which originally went on sale at £16.99, could be found on Amazon at the knock down price of £10.94 a couple of weeks later.

In contrast, other celebrities have been doing been doing their bits (and using them) to spread general understanding worldwide. A muscled-up Kevin Bacon speaking out on climate change. An unusually humble Chris Eubank protesting against the current situation in Iraq (and never mind the fact that he also worked for McDonalds and Nescafe; evolution takes time). Danny Glover is currently touring and speaking out against the US-led coup in Haiti. While Ruby Wax has just pulled out of participating in an Israeli Independence festival in London. 'It's because I don't agree with what Israel just did,'

she declared, referring to the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Go! Buy their books/ see their films/have strange, lonely fantasies about them now!

CHRISTIANS ON THE CASE

Watch it, right-wing, fundamentalist Armageddon-heads. Church leaders across the world may have been remarkably silent while you shifted their peace love and tolerance sort of message to a bombs, bombs, and more bombs sort of message, but now the real Christians are coming. Grass roots Christians, like the Jesus Christians, for example, who are going so far as to suggest that Mr Bush is not, in fact, entitled to pursue a policy of extermination and destruction just because something he calls his God told him to. While in Britain and abroad, Christians are currently being mobilised to, of all things, boycott Pepsi, or more precisely, Pepsi's new can. The problem, apparently, is that Pepsi has a new 'patriotic' can coming out, with pictures of the Empire State Building and the Pledge of Allegiance on them. Unfortunately, say the Christians, Pepsi have left out two small words from the Pledge - 'Under God'. 'Pepsi won't be offended when they don't receive our money that has the words 'In God We Trust' on it'; fulminates one devout cola lover, urging his fellow Christians to 'forward this to others fast'.

CAPITALISM REPRESENTS ACCEPTABLE POLICY

No, really it does. Capitalism Represents Acceptable Policy is a new, campaigning website designed to kick other more stupid websites firmly in the goolies. 'We', the site announces proudly, 'want a world where civilised people can consume without fear, pollute without prejudice and secure unlimited access to global resources without guilt (or images on TV of starving children)'. The website features the first ever pro-capitalist marches, whose participants wave banners proclaiming 'More roads! Less Trees!' and 'Bombs Not Bread!'. It would seem, on closer inspection, to be something of a joke. Even without the acronym...

GOOGLE WHACK

Corporate Watch was recently pleased to hear that it is something called a 'googlewhack'. 'This is not a bad thing' reassured the kind person who sent us the info. 'It just means that, out of the 3 billion pages that Google (the internet search engine) holds, yours is the only one containing the words 'zoologists' and 'courgette' on the same page'.

One in 3 billion? We looked it up, and, good grief, it was true. In all the world, only the Corporate Watch Newsletter Issue 16 contains the words zoologists and courgette on the same page. We knew we were unique.

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