

# Tales from the Planet

Fifth Estate Collective

1996

**The British libel proceeding brought by McDonald's** against two activists with Greenpeace London over their fact sheet, "What's Wrong With McDonald's," continued into the new year with no end in sight. The \$26 billion a year junk food giant objects to the leaflet's characterization of them as abusing animals, destroying the rain forest, conning kids, creating mountains of waste, and being anti-labor.

The trial began in June 1994 and on December 12, 1995 became the longest civil case in British history. Libel laws in England generally favor the plaintiff and numerous other critics of McDonald's over the years have backed down or retracted their statements.

However, the defendants, Dave Morris and Helen Steel, assembled 180 witnesses to support the truth of the pamphlet. They've included environmental and nutritional experts, trade unionists, animal welfare experts, former McDonald's employees, even the corporation's top executives, and four infiltrators employed by the company.

According to Dave Morris, one of the defendants, "It's clear that McDonald's aim of suppressing the leaflet has totally backfired."

This summer, in an attempt to settle the suit which has given the company a major public relations black eye, McDonald's board members flew to London in an attempt to arrange an end to the case. However, Morris and his co-defendant would not agree to any settlement which involved a cessation of distribution of the leaflet in question.

Recent testimony has included several ex-employee witnesses who testified about unsafe and unsanitary work conditions at McDonald's outlets, adulterated food, and how "any active member of a union will not be tolerated" by the management.

The trial may run until Summer 1996.

**In arenas around North America the "sport" of trophy hunting** has been colliding with professional basketball. The Grizzly Project, a group from Nelson, British Columbia, are exposing the NBA's newest expansion team, the Vancouver Grizzlies, for using the threatened animal's namesake. They've encouraged demonstrations at all Grizzlies road games.

The team's marketing strategy is complicit in the ongoing slaughter of the bear, says Candace Batycki, the group's founder.

"They are targeting children with a mass-marketed cartoon logo depicting an attacking bear," she says. Batycki, who hikes frequently in grizzly habitat, says the opposite is true: grizzlies typically shy away from encounters with humans.

"This harmful image only serves to further the myth of a dangerous predator," adds Irwin Oostindie, Grizzly Project communications director. "Their logo can be found in Vancouver on everything from McDonald's french fry containers and Coke cups, to plastic pencil cases and other commodities for kids."

The grizzly in Canada continues to lose habitat to logging, mining, oil and gas exploration and road building which accompanies extractive industries. Estimates of the bear's population range from a low of only 3,000. Only 700 to 900 are left in the U.S. BC is one of the last places where grizzlies can be hunted legally and trophy hunting is the major cause of bear mortality. Meat is seldom if ever taken.

The grizzly is the slowest reproducing large omnivore in North America yet legally licensed hunts in British Columbia take 300 each year, leaving cubs to die as well if the target is a female. Poachers are estimated to take an equal number, much of it for grizzly body parts and organs used in Asian medical remedies.

Batycki says the basketball team owes “dues” because of the choice of its name. Trying to outflank public criticism, the Grizzlies team management recently joined with the BC Ministry of Environment in a provincial management scheme called “A Future for the Grizzly.” Although the team committed \$200,000 to the plan, the Grizzly Project calls it “greenwashing,” since it still allows for the issuance of thousands of grizzly hunting permits in 1996.

The Project fought for two years to abolish trophy hunting, but the Ministry plan, after intense pressure from the guide-outfitters and forest industry lobbies, creates a network of so-called grizzly “sanctuaries.” Although hunting is banned within these areas, habitat destroying clearcuts, mining and roads are still permitted.

Grizzly Project demonstrations have already occurred in Seattle and at the Grizzlies’ new Vancouver “gladiator’s arena,” General Motors Place, where spectators view pre-game videos depicting “virtual wilderness” projected on massive monitors above the court.

The Project will provide a schedule of the Grizzlies’ NBA games in North America this Spring, and since demonstrations and leafleting are usually not allowed at sports facilities, they promise bail money and legal defense aid for anyone arrested.

For information, contact the Grizzly Project: PO Box 957, Nelson BC, Canada VI L 6A 5, phone/fax, (604) 355-BEAR (2327). The Bear Hotline at (800) 836- 550 I; or e-mail: grizzly@vworldtel.com.

**A loose coalition of people coordinated by the radical city environmental group, Reclaim the Streets**, occupied a major intersection in London, July 23, and held a street party in protest against the overuse of private motorcars.

Police sealed off a subway stop in anticipation of the action, but a crowd of nearly a thousand took the train one stop farther and swarmed onto Upper Street. street. Within minutes, they turned the area into a vehicle-free zone. Banners were unfurled and stretched across the street’s four lanes and anchored to traffic lights and lampposts

A ton of sand was dumped, creating a children’s play area complete with paddling pool. Huge tripods were erected at the ends of now pedestrianized the Upper Street, with a person suspended within each to deter traffic. Food stalls, sound systems, a rock band and an armored military vehicle with blaring speakers were installed.

Police vans, sirens wailing, screamed into the area, but were unable to halt what had now developed into a public festival. Most people, including this writer, found the street party by following a hovering police helicopter.

Several thousand more people swelled the gathering including diners and local residents. By 8:00 pm the revelers had dispersed although a hard core group of 200 stayed to confront riot police who had arrived to clear the area. 20 arrests were made.

There have been numerous anti-road struggles in the UK (See FE, last issue) and there are currently 22 road building schemes in Britain in the planning stages. Nine have been shelved due to pressure from environmentalists.

—Alec Smart, Black & Green, 10 Waterloo Place, Brighton BN2 2NB, East Sussex, UK

FE Note: Alec sends us numerous stories, but our limited printing schedule allows for publication of very few of them. He would welcome other outlets for his stories and photos.

**Flag loving patriotism went down to an inglorious defeat December 12** when the U.S. Senate failed to muster the votes needed to pass a Constitutional amendment to protect Old Glory from “physical desecration.” The 63 to 36 tally was a scant three votes shy of the two-thirds needed.

The country would have seen thousands of its symbol going up in smoke if the amendment had passed, since a campaign of defiance was in the works to send charred remains of flags to politicians.

A 1989 U.S. Supreme Court decision struck down a Texas law banning flag burning as unconstitutional after an RCP member in Texas had been convicted of the charge.

Patriots and political opportunists supporting the amendment were vague on exactly what constitutes “desecration,” but who it would be used against was clear from earlier Senate hearings.

When a group of protesters stood in the back of the room and gagged themselves with flags, South Carolina Sen. Strom Thurmond inquired of a witness, “Those people back there, with the flags over their mouths, for I can’t imagine what reason—if we passed this Amendment, could we have them arrested?”

By the way, the only officially sanctioned form for disposal of worn or soiled U.S. flags is burning.

**Southeastern Michigan's big, real bad nuclear reactor** has been up and operating for a while, so the sensible response is—"Run For Your Life"—the third annual run/walk event to shut Fermi 2. It'll held be Sat., May 18, registration at 10:30 am, with the event starting at noon; \$1 registration fee: call 313/242-0102 or write Mark Farris, PO Box 1069, Monroe MI 48161 for info.

**As of this issue, our cover price is \$2.** Subscription rates have been raised accordingly. Distributors and bulk sellers will be notified as to increased costs. Hopefully, this raise will bring in needed revenue.

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