

McLIBEL SUPPORT CAMPAIGN

Update - August '92

McDONALD'S TRIES TO SILENCE ITS EVER MORE NUMEROUS CRITICS - MAJOR PUBLIC 'LIBEL TRIAL AGAINST LONDON GREENPEACE SUPPORTERS ON LINE FOR EARLY-1993. FREE SPEECH CAMPAIGN GATHERS MOMENTUM.

The McDonald's Hamburger Corporation is the largest retail property owner and food service organisation in the world, with annual sales of nearly £20 billion. But behind the slick advertising and glossy image is the reality - profiteering from exploiting workers and consumers, murdering animals, destroying the environment, pushing unhealthy food, indoctrinating children and creating a junk culture.

Many people over the years have criticised and protested about McDonald's practices. In 1985 London Greenpeace (a small, independent collective active since 1970) launched a general anti-McDonald's campaign to try to co-ordinate and strengthen opposition. The campaign has been enormously successful, especially the world-wide, annual Anti-McDonald's Day on October 16th (UN World Food Day), involving hundreds of local pickets and protests. A special, detailed Factsheet 'What's Wrong With McDonald's - Everything They Don't Want You To Know' was produced by the group and was soon translated and taken up in scores of countries.

McDonald's initially attempted to ignore such opposition but then began to counter it. On one hand they massively stepped up their propaganda efforts (including producing their own 'McFact' cards) and began to project a 'green, caring' image. On the other hand they began to use the legal system to try to suppress free speech. A range of organisations and media bodies, from both radical movements and from the establishment, were threatened with costly and time-consuming libel proceedings and forced to 'apologise' for daring to criticise this transnational corporation. (This has included The Guardian, Channel 4, Scottish TUC, vegetarian and green groups, labour research institutes and many more). However, the grass-roots campaign continued to grow, and so in September 1990 individuals connected to London Greenpeace had writs served on them, alleging 'libel' in the Factsheet. The aim was to try to create a climate of intimidation against activists in order to censor the production and distribution of leaflets.

Fighting For Free Speech

Rather than halting protests, this threat to free speech only served to further damage McDonald's reputation and to strengthen the determination of their critics. Helen Steel and Dave Morris, backed by London Greenpeace and the McLibel Support Campaign, have resolved to fight this major libel case to show that intimidation must never be allowed to succeed.

Despite the enormous costs, the amount of work, the difficulties of doing international research and the legal complexities of the case (Legal Aid is refused for libel cases), Helen and Dave have already attended various preliminary court hearings and are now preparing for the public trial next year.

Libel laws are stacked in favour of the rich and powerful. However, the trial will be a public forum for the truth in front of the world's media - they will be able to publish (without fear of libel writs) the facts about McDonald's practices presented to the jury. It should be a real eye opener for millions of people and a spur to further protests and boycotts. This is why the case must be fought.

Helen and Dave are unwaged and are up against the colossal resources of the McDonald's Corporation. The McLibel Support Campaign was formed to give them the financial and practical backing, and the publicity and general solidarity they need.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

Legal

McDonald's have admitted that it's not their case that Helen and Dave actually wrote or printed the Factsheet, but have refused to drop the case claiming they handed it out on a couple of occasions! Meanwhile, the McLibel 2 have attended 5 preliminary High Court hearings, and drawn up (with informal legal advice) long and detailed documents of Defence, and 'Further & Better Particulars' etc. In June '92 they summonsed McDonald's to try to force them to hand over details of Helen and Dave's alleged involvement, which would expose McDonald's spying activities (including using an infiltrator) - their reply is awaited.

McDonald's tactics up till this summer seem to have been to drag out the proceedings, hoping to exhaust or financially cripple the defendants. However, now that they realise the defendants' determination to fight the case, they are planning to rush through the next and most exhausting phase - 'interrogatories' - where all the relevant and available research, documents, witnesses and expert details need to be presented to the Court by the end of the year. And 'directions for the trial' (date, length, form etc) will be ordered. The full trial

is expected to take place next year. The defendants are also appealing to the European Court of HumanRights over the refusal of Legal Aid, and hope to gain publicity about this outrageously unfair and repressive situation.

Research

Contacts have been made in many countries, and also with experts and campaigning groups in different fields of interest. However, this is time-consuming and expensive, especially with the detail required, and the need for 'primary' evidence (judges refuse to allow 'hearsay' evidence such as news cuttings, books, films etc - although all such items are very useful in preparing the case).

Support

Its encouraging to discover just how much opposition there has been, and is continuing, to McDonald's (against their packaging, working conditions, for animal rights etc). Last year we called a Day of McLibel Solidarity actions on May 18th, with protests in over a dozen countries. Following the international October 16th Anti-McDonald's Day protests, on November 9th 500 people marched through central London in a lively and angry solidarity demonstration. And local pickets continue every week.. There've also been hundreds of letters of support. As it gets closer to the trial, specific solidarity actions, fundraising, articles and so on are becoming more and more important. Go for it! Gigs and benefit tapes have both proved a valuable source of money for the MSC. We thank everyone who's donated or organised collections.

Anti-McDonald's Campaign

Naturally, the best response to this threat to free speech is to redouble the protests outside local McDonald's branches, especially on October 16th this year. Leaflets are available from Veggies in Nottingham (see below). Let's show them that any empire built on exploitation, suffering and lies can be undermined.. PLEASE SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN.

APPEAL

1. Please step up the protests against McDonald's. Send us reports. Leaflets available in bulk from Veggies, 180 Mansfield Rd, Nottingham 0602 585666. Cost approx £9 (+ postage) per 1,000.Can be printed with your local details. Also posters & badges from them.
2. Circulate details of the case widely (and internationally).Copy our leaflets.
3. Send us information about McDonald's practices (news cuttings, research material, personal experiences etc).
4. Volunteer to help with research. We need people to visit libraries, tap into specialist computer data sources, to contact groups in various countries etc).
5. We need translators, especially german or spanish.
6. Money. We need thousands of pounds to be able to do the basic work.
7. We need printing, photocopying, phone calls & faxes, T-Shirts & badges etc, free or cheap.
8. Please get your group, trade union or organisation to send messages of support/donations.

BOYCOTT McDONALD'S

Fri October 16th 4.30 - 6.30pm
Demonstrate at McDonald's UK HQ
High Rd,N2 (by E.Finchley -)
- or at your local branch -

DEFEND FREE SPEECH

Saturday October 31st 5pm
McLibel Support Campaign - meeting
for supporters. During London Greenpeace
Fayre,Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq,WC1

I/We back the McLibel Support Campaign _____

Name Name of Group

Address Phone

I/we can help with: fundraising____, translations____, research____, writing articles____
organising protests____, free/cheap printing/merchandise/phone/fax (delete)____

I/we enclose a donation £____ (cheques to McLibel Support Campaign)

Return to: McLibel SC, London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 (081 837 7557)