



AS McDONALD'S TRIES TO SILENCE ITS EVER MORE NUMEROUS CRITICS, 2 UNWAGED LONDON GREENPEACE SUPPORTERS ARE DEFENDING THEMSELVES AGAINST THE TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATION IN A MAJOR LIBEL CASE. A FREE SPEECH / DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN IS GATHERING MOMENTUM..

The trial, originally set for October '93, has now been put back a few months due to the complexity of the case.

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 - a profiteering racket :

- exploiting workers - low pay, military-style work, no trade unions
- conning customers - overpriced, mass-produced and unhealthy 'food'
- indoctrinating children - over £100m spent annually on sophisticated ads and dodgy promotions to entice kids in
- destroying the environment - with their packaging and waste, and the effects of beef ranching
- abusing animals - millions are imprisoned and murdered every year, completely unnecessarily
- creating a junk culture - plastic and soulless

Many people over the years have criticised and protested about McDonalds' 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. This has been enormously successful, especially the world-wide annual Anti-McDonald's Day every October 16th (UN World Food Day), involving hundreds of local protests. A detailed 6-sided Factsheet: 'What's Wrong With McDonald's - Everything They Don't Want You To Know' - was produced and translated and taken up in dozens 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 they began to project a 'green, caring' image. On the other hand they began to use the legal system to try to suppress free speech. In Britain, a range of organisations and media bodies, from radical movements and from the establishment, were threatened with costly and time-consuming libel proceedings. They were forced to 'apologise' for daring to criticise this transnational corporation - (this has included the Scottish TUC, vegetarian and green groups, labour research institutes, The Guardian, Channel 4 and many more). However, the grass-roots campaign continued to grow. Then in September 1990, after having sent spies to London Greenpeace meetings and events, individuals connected to the group had writs served on them, alleging the group's Factsheet was 'libellous'. The aim was to try to create a climate of intimidation against activists in order to censor the production and distribution of leaflets to the public.

FIGHTING FOR FREE SPEECH

Rather than halting protests, this threat to free speech has 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.

The defendants are unemployed, yet have been refused Legal Aid. Despite the enormous costs, the amount of work, the difficulties of doing international research and the legal complexities of the case, Helen and Dave are now preparing for a full public trial this winter. Libel laws are stacked in favour of the rich and powerful, and defendants, if they lose, usually face a mammoth bill for costs and 'damages', as well as a gagging injunction (which, if defied, could lead to jail). However, the trial will be a public forum for the truth in front of the world's media, who will be able to publish, without fear of libel writs, the facts about McDonalds' 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 McDonalds' empire. The McLibel Support Campaign was formed to give them the financial and practical backing, and the publicity and solidarity they need.

THE LEGAL NEWS SO FAR

The fast food giant has admitted that it's not their case that Helen and Dave actually even wrote or printed the Factsheet, but they've refused to drop the case claiming the defendants handed it out on a couple of occasions! Meanwhile the McLibel 2 have attended 12 preliminary High Court hearings, and drawn up (with informal legal advice) long and detailed documents of 'Defence', 'Further & Better Particulars', counter summonses etc.

McDonalds' tactics originally were to drag out the proceedings, hoping to exhaust or financially cripple the defendants. However, once they realised the defendants' determination to fight the case, they began to dramatically speed up the process and pile on the workload. Research and preparations for the case have been time consuming and expensive. Witnesses have to be called for every subject, but 'hearsay' evidence such as anything published in newspapers, books and films, is not allowed.

This year Helen and Dave have been set a gruelling timetable of legal work to prepare for the eventual 5 week trial. Normal procedure is that each side must disclose all relevant documents and then a couple of months later witness statements are exchanged. However, the court turned this on its head and instead ordered the defendants to serve the statements of all their witnesses within three weeks. This was an attempt by McDonalds to get Helen and Dave's case thrown out by the back door in the hope that, due to lack of money and experience, they would be unable to get all the statements they needed in that short

period. Despite this, statements from 65 people were served for the defence, including about 30 from experts on the environment, nutrition and health, animal welfare, workplace conditions etc. McDonalds are looking worried now, and at recent hearings have sent their Vice President to observe the proceedings.

The Great Cover Up - McDonald's are legally obliged in pre-trial procedures to answer a list of defence questions about all the issues in the case, and to hand over all relevant documents about their practices in their possession world-wide, however sensitive. They are refusing to do so. They are terrified of having to reveal what they've been able to hide for so long - that they are a fraud, and that their critics have been right all along. Instead they've provided mostly bland 'policy' details, annual reports and accounts of charitable activities. The court is colluding in this COVER UP and the fast food giant is preparing to use the trial as a propaganda platform. They're also applying for the trial to be without a jury - just what are they afraid of?

To publicise the outrageously unfair and oppressive libel laws, the defendants took the British Government to the European Court of Human Rights. But they decided, without a full hearing, that because Helen and Dave had put up a 'tenacious defence' they therefore couldn't claim that UK libel laws were oppressive!

SUPPORT - It's encouraging to discover just how much opposition world-wide there has been, and continues to be, against McDonald's. There have also been protests in support of the defendants, a day of McLibel Solidarity (with protests in a dozen countries) and a 500-strong demonstration in London. Local pickets continue every week. We thank the hundreds of people who've written letters, articles, passed resolutions and sent donations they've raised. As the trial approaches, it's vital that this support grows! Of course the best response to this threat to free speech is to redouble the local protests. Lets show that opposition to injustice can never be silenced and that any empire built on exploitation, suffering and lies can be undermined...

FREE SPEECH PLEDGE - Free speech is our right. We call on all concerned and campaigning organisations to pledge to defy libel threats and to freely circulate anti-McDonald's literature, whatever the verdict at the trial - *over half a million leaflets have already been handed out on the streets since this case started!* Let's show them that efforts to silence critics will backfire. PLEASE SIGN THE 'FREE SPEECH PLEDGE' BELOW.

APPEAL

1. Please STEP UP THE PROTESTS against McDonald's. Send us reports. Leaflets in bulk from: Veggies, 180 Mansfield Rd, Nottingham - 0602 585666. Cost approx £9 per 1,000 + postage. Can be printed with your local group contact. Veggies also have Anti-Mac posters and badges.
2. CIRCULATE DETAILS OF THE CASE widely, and internationally. Copy this leaflet.
3. SEND US INFORMATION about McDonald's practices (news cuttings, research material, personal experiences etc).
4. Please RAISE MONEY. Lots of money is needed to prepare the case, to bring witnesses to the trial etc.
5. Please get your group to SEND MESSAGES OF SUPPORT and donations, and to put this leaflet in their mailouts / paper.

We need you to help in the campaign. Please fill in the slip below, or come along to the weekly London meetings.

We call for local protests in the week before the trial - and at the High Court on the first day.

**WORLDWIDE ANTI-McDONALD'S DAY (WEEKEND) PROTESTS ON SATURDAY 16th OCTOBER
NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION ON THE 16th - EUSTON STATION 1pm (March through Central London)**

(also: Fri Oct 15th 4.30-6.30pm Picket McDonalds' Euro-HQ, High Rd, London N2 (opp. E.Finchley Tube)

National Meeting of the Campaign, Oct 30th, 4pm, at the London Greenpeace Fayre, Conway Hall WC1

I / We back the McLibel Support Campaign

I / We also back the 'Free Speech Pledge'

Name Name of Group

Address Phone

I / We can help with: fundraising, translations (lang.?), research, spreading information in the following movements : trade unions / civil liberties / green / animal rights / socialist / anarchist / other
organising protests, free/cheap printing/merchandise/phone/fax equipment/use (delete)

I / We enclose a Donation : £..... (cheques to 'McLibel Support Campaign').

Return to McLibel Support Campaign c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1. Ph 071 837 7557