



Press Release 22 March 2007

RADLEY LAKES AND THE THREAT TO OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES

Tuesday evening's Channel 4 news bulletin spent seven minutes discussing the Radley Lakes issue. This report didn't just highlight the environmental vandalism involved in a big German owned power station turning a pristine, wildlife- rich, British lake into an unsightly ash tip to flatter their profits.

This time the broadcast concentrated on the sinister implications of a badly drafted law - The Protection from Harassment Act of 1997. This law has enabled RWE npower, owner of the Power Station, to challenge those things which we claim to hold dear: freedom of peaceful protest, assembly, and freedom of the press. These have all been removed at a stroke at the Radley Lakes by a high court judge, who, on the basis of flimsy, unsubstantiated and uncontested 'evidence', has issued a draconian injunction covering the area. This injunction even forbade the press from photographing RWE npower employees destroying the lake and its surroundings; no doubt a very desirable consequence for npower! It also named respectable members of the community, causing them great distress and seriously affecting the health of at least one of them.

This Act is a corporation's dream as it effectively stops any meaningful public protest against their anti social activities. It is time for our politicians to look at it long and hard and to remember that they are elected to serve the interests of the people and not the interests of big business. The press urgently need to bring to their attention the consequences of this pernicious act for democracy and the freedoms for which we, in this country, have fought long and hard!!

Link to the Channel Four item:

www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/environment/injunction+stops+power+protest/323347

Link to the many other news links pertaining to this issue posted at

www.radleyvillage.org.uk/news/news0032.htm

Annexe

The following is a commentary on the seven minute news item, broadcast on Channel 4 News on 20 March 2007. The reporter was Alex Thomson, ITN chief correspondent.

This is a cautionary tale of how large corporations are able to suspend some basic freedoms we thought we enjoyed. What began as a local environmental battle has become a lot more serious. The people of Radley village took on the electricity giant npower (RWE npower), to prevent it from destroying a local beauty spot. *"It was a County Nature Reserve"*, said Reverend Malcolm Carroll, *"and also it's been used by local people for two generations, and they're claiming it as common land, and there's a Public Inquiry next month to settle that, by which time, of course, npower will have trashed it completely."* Chain-saws have been hard at work in preparation for filling in Radley Lake. Soon, the entire lake will be obliterated with half a million tonnes of ash from Didcot Power Station, containing amongst other pollutants, arsenic, though the company doing it, (RWE npower) says the levels of arsenic are not dangerous, and coal ash dumping is the cheapest option. *"It's our intention basically to carefully fill it, expertly cover it and to make sure that it gets returned to nature"* said an npower spokesman, ignoring local heavy criticism of other "ecological restorations" done by the firm.

With organised protest for nearly two years by local group, Save Radley Lakes, nobody expected that npower would do something extraordinary. They served an injunction on six protestors and then *"in a public road, masked security guards and lawyers served the injunction on a photo-journalist, trying to document contractors destroying the lake"*, reported Alex Thomson. A lawyer was filmed, with his face blotted out, distributing injunctions *"You are not allowed to take photographs of any protected persons"*, said the lawyer, *"which includes ourselves and security people on this site."* This turned a 'little local difficulty' into a national issue, which strikes at the right to assemble, to protest peacefully, to have a free and open press and media, but viewers of this report would be enjoined by law and could face up to five years in prison. In effect, covering the story of the destruction of the lake is now a criminal offence.

"This is a news story", said photo-journalist Adrian Arbib, *"and for me being stopped carrying out photography for a news story is actually putting me out of a job. But it's also denying the public information of what's going on."*

Lawrence Webb (editor of the South Oxfordshire Courier) commented *"Our job is being compromised and we can't report what is going on our doorstep because some multinational company has decided to take a heavy hand against people who live in the area, who are concerned at what's going on."*

npower insist they never intended to interfere with the media. They claim that their people were so harassed by the protestors that their identities had to be protected. The protest has been loud. Yet Thames Valley Police have made no arrests for any violent offences in months of protest at the lake. Indeed npower produced little evidence of violence when they went to court. They obtained their

banning order purely on anonymous witness statements, not one of these witnesses being questioned in court, with the people accused of harassment unable to tell their side. They didn't even know the hearing was happening.

Reverend Malcolm Carroll explained that he was named in the injunction simply because he had issued press releases in his own name and had used the first person plural: *'We are trying to save this nature reserve'*. Mustn't he have acted threateningly to have been named in the injunction? *"Of course, but we are absolutely not threatening people. All the folk that I've met here were peaceful protestors, local residents, other environmentalists..."*

"npower make electricity, not law" said Alex Thomson, "and attempted, via a protocol, to play down the banning of journalists, but we are advised that this protocol has no legal basis. Precisely these tactics are now being used across Britain to limit peaceful protest and ban unwelcome media images. As for Radley Lakes, npower advise us that the wild-life is achieving what the protestors could not. The discovery of nesting water-fowl at the site means its destruction will be delayed!"

Notes for editors

Rev Malcolm Carroll, who appeared in the programme, is not a member of Save Radley Lakes and has never been appointed as a spokesman for Save Radley Lakes. This was a mistaken assumption by the programme makers.

The Radley Lakes area was designated a County Wildlife Site in 2005.

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