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RWE NPOWER BULLY BOY TACTICS AIM TO SUPPRESS FREE SPEECH AND GAG THE PRESS

In a terrifying escalation of the Radley Lakes dispute, RWE npower issued a draconian injunction, which seriously curtails the freedom of the press, TV and anyone who might wish to protest at the lakes. They have deliberately and massively hyped up and exaggerated the actions of one or two more vociferous, yet peaceful, protesters to justify this dangerous attack on our civil liberties.

One consequence of the injunction is that the press are no longer able to take pictures of any npower employees or contractors at the lakes, even though these are mainly burly security guards wearing black balaclavas. These have no visible identification and walk around in groups of two or three, intimidating the public who have walked in the area for years.

Today, a lawyer for the company was standing at the side of a public road handing out injunctions to anyone who had the temerity to point a camera at a group of workers clearing trees from an island used by nesting birds.

However, whilst we can no longer take pictures of them, they can film us with impunity and do so regularly, even though we are using a public place and causing no trouble. They even stand filming us under the watchful eye of the many police who seem to feel it necessary to be in attendance!

It could now even be an offence to demonstrate peacefully at the lakes. So much for the values we supposedly cherish such as the right to protest peacefully and freedom of speech.

A spokesperson for Save Radley Lakes said:

“We have seen this injunction which appears to be extremely broadly drafted. Unfortunately, we think it also so badly drafted that it is very unclear who it applies to. Our lawyers are looking at it now. It appears to represent a major infringement of civil liberties, and especially of the right to peaceful protest. The Save Radley Lakes campaign against this development has been entirely peaceful and lawful, and this injunction is frightening.

All this has happened because RWE npower has mismanaged its affairs to an extraordinary degree. The company knew at least two years ago that Thrupp Lake was a very sensitive area, and that local people would be devastated and outraged if it was destroyed. RWE npower could have listened then and chosen to develop an alternative. They decided not to do that. They simply put their heads down and ploughed on with their destructive plans for Thrupp Lake, giving little or no thought to the consequences. It's an almost text book example of how not to do business in the community today.

RWE npower lost the moral argument for this disastrous scheme a long time ago – and they know it. Now, the only thing that's left to them is to use bully-boy tactics to threaten and intimidate local people. They've got themselves into a deep hole, and all they can think of doing is lashing out at peaceful, law-abiding, campaigners.

And they certainly don't want pictures of what they're doing to Thrupp Lake printed in the newspapers or shown on the TV – so they've got an injunction which bans filming of the work.

RWE npower has claimed all along that they have 'no alternative' to dumping their ash in Thrupp Lake. We have always believed this to be untrue. Now that they are under the spotlight, they are changing their story. They now say that Thrupp Lake is their 'best available option' rather than their only one. 'Best' means cheapest and easiest – in other words, most profitable for RWE npower, with the environment and the community paying the real price. It's just naked greed.

It's an ugly spectacle to see a huge, foreign-owned corporation abusing its legal and financial power to erode the freedoms of ordinary English people, just so that the company can increase its profits. We feel as if we are being trampled beneath jackboots. RWE's management in Germany should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. The activities of this single company reflect huge discredit on Germany.”

Background note

Thrupp Lake (Radley) is a large and very beautiful lake in the Oxfordshire countryside, close to the River Thames. It has water of exceptional purity. It is extremely rich in wildlife, including protected species such as kingfisher and water voles. The lake seems also to be used by otters. The lake and surrounding area has been used for quiet informal recreation by local people from Abingdon and Radley for over fifty years. It was declared a County Wildlife Site in July 2006.

RWE npower intends to destroy the lake by using it as a dump for 500,000 tonnes of ash from the coal-fired Didcot Power Station nearby. They were granted planning permission for this by Oxfordshire County Council in January 2007. 11,500 people signed a petition which was presented to RWE npower in July 2006. Over 3,000 people objected to the planning application.

In December 2006, an application to have the land registered as a 'Town Green' was accepted as valid by Oxfordshire County Council. This would protect the land from development. The application is due to be decided later this year. RWE npower was asked not to start work before the Town Green application is decided. They have begun work anyway.

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