

Ronald McDonald is an exploiter

Dan Mills of the McLibel Support Campaign spoke to Joan Trevor

IN THE late '80s London Greenpeace distributed a leaflet called "What's wrong with McDonald's?" outside McDonald's restaurants. In September 1990 McDonald's issued libel writs against five London Greenpeace members. Three of the five apologised, but two — Helen Steel and Dave Morris — went to court. The marathon trial began in June 1994 and will go on 'til the end of 1995.

The original leaflet was an exposé of the fast food industry as a whole, using McDonald's as an example because it is the world's largest single user of beef and also because they're one of the most successful companies.

They're in so many different countries and they're very successful at advertising to children, which we find particularly insidious. There was a survey done in the US of children's awareness of fictional characters. Ronald McDonald came a close second to Santa Claus. That's why McDonald's was chosen.

Their litigiousness — that's also a factor, because they have been one of the worst companies for throwing their legal weight

around.

MacDonald's policy seemed to be: sue anyone that criticises us. It had been extremely successful. They'd sued a range of people — the BBC to the *Bournemouth Advertiser*, the Scottish TUC, the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and they had all backed down.

What we would say to the people who like the food is, if you're concerned about your health you'd be advised not to eat it. Basically the food is not good for you.

We would like to see more community-based food outlets where the emphasis isn't high turnover, and high profits but decent jobs for the people working there and decent food for the people eating, and also doing it in a small, sustainable way using local produce, for example, not using disposable packaging — all of which has a much smaller impact on the environment.

We talk about taking over multinationals — running them not for profit but for need. Do you see that as an ultimate aim, or would you want to do away with them and go back to the small is beautiful?

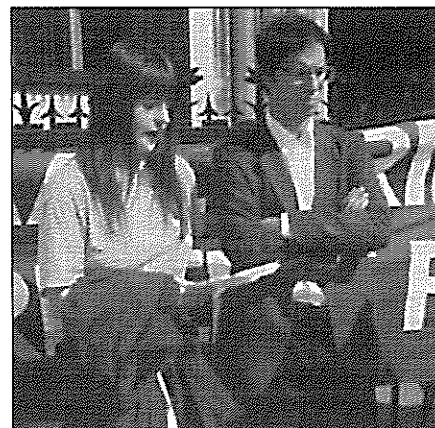
You can't really take organisations like MacDonalds and steer them in another direction. It would need a completely new structure, a new system without exploitation, which, I would say — and I'm sure Helen and Dave would agree — is a small-is-beautiful idea: bringing things down to a community level and having things provided where the need is, at a local level, so people take control over their lives, rather than multinationals having all this power and control.

If you could organise — unionise — the workers in British McDonald's and French McDonald's, the French McDonald's reps would talk to the British McDonald's reps... If you organise workers in a big company that is spread out across the world it would be something precious to hold on to...

Unions are one of McDonald's main fears. It's one of the things that puts in jeopardy their whole business ethic, to keep labour costs as low as possible, to have as high a staff turnover as possible so that people don't get established. You are much less likely to get unions in a store if you've got a high staff turnover. They particularly aim at getting a young labour force, and getting people from disadvantaged groups such as black people and women because they can exploit them more.

There have been places where McDonald's have had to concede to unions — like Dublin, where there was a strike in 1979. In Norway they've just signed an agreement with trade unions.

Right from when they started in the 1950s, they've gone out of their way to combat unions. Stan Stein, who is the head



McLibel defendants Helen Steel and Dave Morris

of labour relations and personnel, spends a lot of his time going where there is what they see as trouble to make sure that they win any confrontation. They sack people regularly for being members of the unions, normally finding some other reason for it.

How are the defendants bearing up?

It's an exhausting battle for them. It's been going on since 1990 but in the last two years it's been something they've had to work on constantly. It has worn them down a lot, but they get energy from the fact that they're doing well, and that there're all these people, supporting them. In September our witnesses on employment will be giving evidence. We've got about 40 employees and trade union officials and activists from all around the place.

It's going to make it a lot more difficult for them to sue people in future because there'll be all this information that people can get hold of, and all these admissions that they've made in the court. Never mind how the verdict goes, that information is going to be there. ■

Addresses

● McLibel Support Campaign, c/o 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX. Tel/fax: 0171-713 1269. Donations to: "McLibel Support Campaign."

● McDonald's Workers' Support Group, c/o Hackney Trade Union Support Unit, 56 Clarence Road, London E5. Tel: 0171-249 8086.

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Mumia-Abu Jamal update

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL, the black journalist on death row in Pennsylvania, has been granted an indefinite stay of execution so that he can complete his appeal.

Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther and MOVE supporter fitted up for the murder of a police officer in 1981, was set to die on August 17 until Judge Albert Sabo, a 'former' member of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), which is actively campaigning for Abu-Jamal's death, finally granted the stay of execution.

This came after many attempts to stall the defence's case. Judge Sabo, the so-called King of the Death Row (he has sentenced more people to death than any other sitting judge in the US), has not allowed defence evidence proving Abu-Jamal's innocence.

The international campaign against the state murder of Mumia Abu-Jamal has seen demonstrations world-wide - and has even gained support from the French, Italian and Belgian governments. But the stay of execution should be seen only as a small victory.

Send contributions to Mumia's legal defence (cheques payable to Partisan Defence Committee, and with Jamal Legal Defence written on the back) to: Partisan Defence Committee, BCM Box 4986, London WC1N 3XX.