

CONTACT: Lauri Blue, (818) 349-8822
lblue@cinemalibrestudio.com



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Super Sized Support for ‘McLibel’

Global Exchange, CorpWatch and National Lawyers Guild on Board to Promote High-Profile ‘McLibel’ Case Doc. Film Opens in June.

LOS ANGELES – Global Exchange, CorpWatch, National Lawyers Guild, CodePink, Voices for a Viable Future, SF Vegetarian Society and Bay Area Vegetarians have joined forces with Cinema Libre Studio to support the June theatrical release of the controversial documentary ‘McLibel.’

Directed by Franny Armstrong, “McLibel” follows the 15-year story of London Greenpeace activists Helen Steel and Dave Morris as they are transformed from anonymous campaign volunteers into unlikely global heroes. McDonald’s sued the single father and part-time bar worker for libel in 1990, after “McSpies” infiltrated their non-profit group.

Morris and Steel refused to apologize for distributing a leaflet that asked consumers to ponder the question: “What’s Wrong with McDonald’s?” The leaflet listed 15 reasons why the corporation did not have the public’s best interests in mind. The ‘McLibel 2’ defended themselves through what became the longest running legal battle in English history. The case has been described as “the biggest corporate PR disaster” ever.

“For organizations like ours,” says Andrea Buffa, Communications Director of Global Exchange, “that are dedicated to exposing the toll that corporate globalization takes on human rights and environment, it is important we be able to get real information to the public about what corporations are doing. Global Exchange can’t afford billboards and television commercials like the corporations can, so we need to be able to spread our information in other ways – like leafleting outside McDonald’s the way David and Helen did.”

The seven organizations will provide support for the film by spreading the word on a grassroots level and educating their members on the issues raised in the film in relation to their own organizational causes. Some of the orgs will reach out to the media, leafleting outside of McDonald’s in select cities and by creating specific actions to promote the film.

Eric Schlosser, author of “Fast Food Nation,” became a supporter of “McLibel” early by participating in the film as one of the interviewees. In addition, agit-prop artist Ron English generously donated his artwork titled “McAmerica” (owned by Robert C. Carvalho) to use as the “McLibel” poster image in the US.

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In the “McLibel” case (1996-2005), London’s Royal Courts of Justice found McDonald’s marketing to have claimed “a positive nutritional benefit which their food did not match”, that McDonald’s “exploits children” with their advertising strategy, found the company to be “culpably responsible for animal cruelty”, and that it was fair comment to say that McDonald’s employees worldwide “do badly in terms of pay and conditions.” And finally, “If one eats enough McDonald’s food, one’s diet may well become high in fat, with the very real risk of heart disease.”

In February 2005, the European Court of Human Rights declared that the notorious “McLibel” case breached Steel’s and Morris’ rights to a fair trial, to freedom of expression, and had failed to protect the public’s right to criticize massive corporations whose business practices can affect people’s lives, health and the environment. The court’s rulings will likely change the course of British freedom of speech laws forever.

Media interest in the story remains as fevered today as it has been for the past decade and a half.

“This story is an inspiration to activists everywhere,” says Pratap Chatterjee, managing editor/project director of CorpWatch. “Two individuals with no money can defeat multinational Goliaths!”

“McLibel” will open on Friday, June 10th in San Francisco and Seattle and will continue to Minneapolis on June 17th. Exact theaters to be announced shortly and additional cities to be added soon.

Grass root organizations interested in becoming involved in the McLibel campaign should contact Rich Castro at rcastro@cinemalibrestudio.com.

ATTENTION EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: Screeners of “McLibel” and interviews with Franny Armstrong, Dave Morris or Helen Steel are available upon request. To learn more about the feature film “McLibel,” or to download photos, please visit www.McLibelthemovie.com.