

Brighton's trouble makin' dirt diggin' monthly...

ROUGH MUSIC

Brighton's trouble makin' dirt diggin' monthly...

Issue 21 www.roughmusic.org.uk Free/Donation July/Aug 2009

TESCO & STARBUCKS



You win some, you lose some...

STRIKE ACTION SUMMER!!

Twelve years on from the 1997 Single Status Pay Law, which called for all unskilled council workers to be paid fairly and equally, Brighton and Hove City Council is facing strike actions from a number of different sectors.

Trouble began after they were forced to fork out around £37 million in compensation for years of underpaying (mostly women) workers. Council-employed cooks, cleaners, care-workers and support staff have been earning considerably less than their male counterparts in refuse collection and maintenance jobs.

The issue has dragged on for 12 long years, not least because of a dispute over exactly how much back-pay workers would be entitled to even things up. The initial promise of two years was eventually upped to six, following several European Court rulings (but not to 12 years, as you might expect). Although the council's current offer only represents around 60% of the money the workers are entitled to, the promise of £25,000, to be paid in used bills stuffed into brown envelopes and handed over at poorly-lit motorway service stations was enough for most workers.

One group who didn't get the pay-off though, were teaching assistants at faith schools – who have been excluded due to technically being in the employ of their governors, even though their wages come directly from council funding. Ever up-fer-it wild eyed radicals that they are, the teaching assistants scheduled strikes for the end of May, but they were postponed due to legal difficulties. "Morale among staff is in a very bad way and the council seem to have little interest in talking to us," said GMB Union boss, Mark Turner. God was unavailable for comment.

Having started to deal with the issue of back-pay, the council now has until the end of year to bring pay scales into line, presenting it with its next problem – where to get the money from. Recent attempts to recruit a new Chief Exec at £170,000 a year would suggest there's some fat to be trimmed somewhere along the line. The council however, have been aiming lower.

Rather than raise wages across the board, they've struck on the idea of lowering them – all in the name of equality you understand. To kick things off they've asked Brighton's binmen to take a massive wage cut – of between £2,000 and £8,000 a year each, slashing the average wage from £19,000 to below £15,000. Unsurprisingly this hasn't gone down too well with promises of "weeks and possibly months" of strikes.

A council spokesman, apparently not well versed in the finer points of irony, was quoted as saying: "The work we are doing to review pay is fundamentally about fairness... It is our legal and moral responsibility to make sure all our staff are paid fairly for the work they do". So it's only fair if everyone gets less money... Except chief executives of course, who, morality demands, get more than ten times as much.

The Argus meanwhile, is warning residents to prepare for a "summer, autumn and winter of discontent". Which means we can all look forward to spring, by which time all this will have been resolved and peace and equality will reign in our fair (and clean and well-educated) city.

ANTI-TERRORIST ACTIVITIES DAY

'Towelhead fundamentalists' lurking in the biscuit aisle? Ulster Unionists gaining a toehold near the bargain bins? Don't worry 'cos Sussex Police are coming to the rescue with the gloriously-named Project Griffin*.

On 14th and 16th July they'll be training 'businesses and their staff' in the dark arts of counter-terrorism. The taxpayer-funded wheeze (part of a national waste of money) in the Brighton Centre will feature "dynamic presentations" from specialists from the police and military.

Topics covered in the training programme include, 'Hostile Reconnaissance', 'Bomb Scene Management' and, errm, 'Cordon Management' – crucial in combating crazed fundamentalists.

Under the banner "Free counter terrorism training in Brighton – useful for more than just counter terrorism", Sussex cops, realising that the actual chance of a jihadist choosing to self-detonate in Churchill Square is quite low, have promised that counter-terrorism training will serve other purposes.

To quote the press release: "Recognising the signs of suspicious behaviour could be helpful in a variety of situations, e.g. retail staff on the shop-floor looking out for shop-lifters."

So, the next time you're considering a five-finger discount in the North Laines remember to leave yer Koran at home. If you're on the other side of the counter then e-mail victoria.morris@sussex.pnn.police.uk to reserve your place and a free badge and certificate could be yours.

*Apparently the Griffin was chosen to capture the essence of the concept: "protection through vigilance" and not because it represents an entirely mythological concept.

EXPENSES, EXPENSES...

We all knew their noses were deep in the trough but it's always gratifying to have the facts. So, how did our local MPs fare in the Great British Expenses Swine-dle?

Celia Barlow, MP for Hove, has the dubious distinction of being the only Brighton and Hove MP to have made it into the Daily Torygraph hall of fame. In 2005-06, she 'made over' her £550,000 Hove home and claimed moving costs and stamp duty.

Thirty grand of 2nd homes allowance was paid by the House of Commons Fees Office despite the fact it was her main home.

In 2006 she was paid £15,042 for storage, removals and renovations which included re-decorating two bathrooms, with a "high-lustre, silver shower screen" and a whirlpool bath.

Des Turner, who's set to retire at the next election, wasn't quite in the same league – claiming a monthly £450 apiece for food and mortgage interest payments for his second home in London.

On the other hand, David Lepper proved positively parsimonious scrounging a measly £86.98 for bed linen and towels as part of his second home allowance. Although he did get £763 a month in rent for his London property.

Meanwhile, out of town, Lewes MP Norman 'Whiter than White' Baker came out a grubby shade of grey by claiming rent on a second home of £1,473 a month having campaigned for members' expenses to be published in full in the first place.

COPYLEFT - ROUGHIN' IT UP ON THE STREETS OF BRIGHTON

STARBUCKS SUCKS

So Starbucks won their appeal and can stay in Kemptown. No real surprise there then: a transnational chain with deep pockets. What chance for local objection and the council's mealy-mouthed refusal of planning permission?

Starbucks is well-known for aggressive business practices of clustering, cannibalisation and sucking the character out of any town. Add to that anti-union policies, crap support of fair trade and an inexplicable running-tap hygiene practice which wastes 23 million litres of water a day. They even have a branch at Guantanamo Bay – not for the prisoners, you understand.

All this while bleating about the 'Starbucks experience' and 'being sensitive to communities'.

As for real community, 3,000 signatures and more than 400 letters of objection made not a jot of difference to the Inspector at June's Planning Inquiry who said the council's case was "contrived".

The council basically couldn't be bothered to put a proper case together and it was left to protesters to do the work of conducting 'footfall' surveys. Unbelievable, and makes you wonder: how much did the council really want SB out of St James' St?

The inspector also said he had no reason to doubt the till receipts which 'prove' 51% of trade was take-out (the case hinged on the fact Starbucks only had planning permission to operate as a shop and not a cafe).

Fifty-one percent, eh? Far be it from us to suggest that Starbucks would manipulate till receipts to give the impression their legal take-out trade is more than their illegal sit-in – but we did hear of punters before the inquiry being given take-out receipts when they actually sat firmly on their asses.

Furthermore, RM can reveal that the corporate scum snidely bought-out the leasehold from beneath the previous owner's nose by offering a price they couldn't afford. No surprise there either.

The highlight of the whole inquiry had to be the statement by the manager who claimed he'd been harassed and victimised – poor lamb. When pressed, he told of how he'd been 'spat at' in the boozier (who hasn't?) and how he'd had a real hard time of it from the protesters – despite the fact the only time he's ever been seen was when he came out to threaten a 13-year-old waving a leaflet. He also said that the local locksmith refused to unglue the locks when he found out who he was (a RM badge for that man!).

In addition, it turns out Starbucks have been telling customers that protestors have intimidated staff. Hmm. Incidentally, Starbucks originally claimed to employ 16 members of staff, yet at the inquiry they admitted that they only ever provided 5.9 jobs (go figure the .9 bit).

Campaigners plan to step up the protests (a new 4m banner now blocks out the Starbucks window each Saturday) and take their message to other Starbucks in town. You're not wanted! Go fucoffee elsewhere!

THE COUNCIL AND THE CAVEMAN

A man who dug a cave on his allotment is to be evicted by the council because... it doesn't have a fire escape. Doh!

Hilaire Purbrick, aka the Caveman of Brighton, dug a 6ft chamber into the chalk underneath Whitehawk Hill allotments, where he's lived in a shed for 16 years. Despite his success in turning the once vandalised and semi-derelict site into a thriving veg-patch, the council want Hilaire 'orf their land' so they can offer it to more compliant rezzers.

Even with the almighty forces of health & safety against him, Mr Purbrick has refused to cave-in – and is currently looking for legal help to take the case to the European Courts. RM went to visit Hilaire and his hilarious hill-lair, and take it from us: a man who's resourceful enough to dig a meditation cave 20ft down is gonna be a difficult bugger to shift.

Meanwhile, he's trying to woo the council with a new school to teach extra-curricular stuff like sacred geometry and permaculture. It can't hurt that the 'caveman' story has caught on worldwide. Not sure how much time he'll have for meditation now that Al Jazeera and Russian TV are lining up for interviews...

CITY COLLEGE CHAOS

With job losses, a £100m redevelopment rejected and £4m lost on putting the plans together in the first place – it's all going a bit Pete Tong for City College.

EXCLUSIVE

University and College Union (UCU) are in talks with top brass over 20 likely redundancies among support staff. Alison Kelly, UCU branch sec, said she was "looking at the implementation of staffing cuts above and beyond redundancies. We're looking at how this is likely to affect staff, what their rights are, and what collective action, if any, the unions will be taking."

Not exactly fighting talk there, Alison, what happened to 'one out all out'? Seems UCU is resigned to the job losses whilst fighting to prevent further lay-offs - sessional workers face losing hours and their jobs to permanent staff as the budget-losses bite.

The college's glitzy make-over would have seen Pelham Tower and the 100-year-old Cheapside buildings replaced by a huge complex stretching from York Place to Whitecross Street - and brought Brighton one step closer to a steel and glass paradise.

The £4m spent on plans for the redevelopment, which included a major campus at the Albion's new stadium, is unlikely to be fully recouped. Basically, the funding body, the government's Learning and Skills Council, is skint - which is rather inconvenient considering it urged all UK college principals to put together ambitious plans to update their facilities late last year.

Now it announces that it will no longer be supporting schemes to redevelop eight colleges across the county (including Varndean College and BHASVIC) and only 13 out of 180 projects proposed nationally will go ahead until a new review in 2011.

Martin Perry, Albion Chief exec, wasn't too bothered about the college/stadium development going tits-up as he had 'other funding sources' - that'll be Tony 'I've got fucking millions I'm a property developer' Bloom, the club's new chairman.

Meanwhile, in another slightly-less-costly but nonetheless embarrassing balls-up, a caretaker at the college (a very lucky boy to still be in gainful employment) came a cropper last month when he took a £7,000 computer destined for the College's Whitehawk campus to the neighbouring Shepcote tip.

Phil Frier, college principal, has been quoted as saying: "While we are disappointed by this, it comes as no great surprise in the current climate."

The computer or the plans, Phil?

Rough Music Gig List

EDO/ITT Noise Demo

Wednesdays - 4pm-6pm - Home Farm Rd, Moulsecoomb

Migrant English Project

Mondays - 1pm-3.30pm - Cowley Club, 12 London Road

Kids Club

Fridays - 10am-12pm - Cowley Club (Back Building)

Welfare Rights Advice

Fridays - 4pm-5.30pm - Cowley Club, 12 London Road

Brighton Against Starbucks

Saturdays - 10am-12pm - Starbucks, St James Street

Stop Incineration Now!

National day of action against incinerators

11 July - 12pm - The Level

World Development Movement Group Meeting

Campaigning to change the policies that keep people poor

14 Jul - 7.30pm-9.30pm - BPEC, Surrey St

The Lovely Brothers

Satirical cabaret-punk band

17 July - 8pm - Komedia, Gardner St

Bikes Not Bombs

22nd July - 3.30pm - The Level

Critical Mass

31 July & 28 Aug - 6pm-8pm - The Level

Greenpeace Monthly Meeting

6 Aug - 7pm - Cowley Club (Back Building)

Out of the Ordinary Festival

Live solar-powered music - plus talks, workshops and kid's stuff.

18-20 Sept - Knockhatch, Near Hailsham, East Sussex

CHARITY CASES

Brighton & Hove plc is feeling the pinch. For more than 15 years the city's economy has been relying on boutique shops selling useless tat for the front rooms of overpriced houses. Now the economic crisis makes buying that £250 toaster from 'England at Home' a little harder to justify. And just how many Emilio Pucci shoes have landed in landfill?

As ever, our masters have the solution – just keep going! 'Don't Get Burnt' was the snappy title of a conference for Brighton's 'third sector' held on June 11 in the Ramada hotel. The shindig was billed as a survival course for all those involved in running charities and not-for-profit organisations facing big cuts to their budgets - cuts caused by the government reeling in its funding so UK plc can repay all the money it borrowed to bail out its bonus-laden banking chums.

Most of the day focused on helping organisations draw up better tenders for government contracts, positively encouraging the move away from grant-based funding. It's out with the old approach of getting money from charitable trusts to run organisations in the interests of service users. Now it's all about offering value for money as government services are contracted out to the third sector. This makes it look like UK plc is funding hard-up services when in reality they're privatising on the cheap. After all, why pay staff when you can get volunteers to do the work?

The move towards tendering for services forces charities to cut costs so they can 'compete' with the likes of Crapita. This means poorer terms and conditions for staff. Trade Union membership in Brighton's community and voluntary sector is one of the lowest in the country. Yet the so-called 'voice of the sector', the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum, has made no mention of workers' rights or the Trade Union Congress' Living Wage Campaign – which seeks a minimum hourly rate of £7.75 for the City.

Once an organisation is delivering a government contract it also becomes much harder for it to campaign on behalf of its clients. One popular money-spinner is for local groups to involve themselves in back-to-work training programmes for the long-term unemployed. But RM has not seen a single one of those organisations campaign for the right of the unemployed not to have their benefits sanctioned if they fail to attend a course in preparation for minimum-wage McSlavery.

Most importantly, why isn't the community sector campaigning for better, no-strings-attached funding? Why do most Tory local authorities consistently outspend Brighton & Hove when it comes to funding the community and charity sector? Our council gives away £1.5m each year or £6 per head of population. Kent County Council has been Tory since the dawn of time and yet it funds community groups at twice the Brighton rate.

A well-paid policy unit at the council makes all the decisions in cahoots with the middle class managers at the forum and other right (wing) thinking groups. They ask some consultants to draw up a strategy and then call this consultation. These people agreed to waste £50k on a database of local community groups that's out of date and that no one uses. At the same time small grassroots groups are monitored to death for a measly £5k.

Not that this matters to the work-hungry consultants and the likes of Simon Fanshawe (RM#4 Wanker). He spouted his usual crap about how great Tesco is and how anyone opposing replacing cheap food outlets like the open market with artisan quarters must be mad.

Besides a few awkward questions from the floor, there was nothing about over-development. Nor did anyone bother to mention climate change or the suffering of those working in the low-wage economy that keeps the likes of Fanshawe and co in reasonably-priced focaccia. The last thing Brighton needs is more equality, said Fanshawe, in fact the best solution is to get even more rich people to move to Brighton and then watch the wealth 'trickle down' - presumably from that loft apartment high above the slowly rising sea levels.

WANKERS CORNER

A regular column featuring our favourite Brightonians

Bit of an obscure collector's item this issue. Step up Steve Harmer-Strange conservative councillor for Portslade.

Looking like an unfortunate hybrid of an accountant and an undertaker, Steve Harmsway claims to be sticking up for the common man in Portslade (the usual guff about 'tremendous community spirit') but he's actually made his bundle in the speculative 'buy-to-let' bubble which has made life so tough in the City-by-the-Sea.

Mr Strangelove and his wife own around 30 buy-to-let properties in the Brighton area through their company, Grosvenor

Properties – nice work if you can get it. Of course, it was the fact that so many buy-to-let vultures jumped at the chance of easy cash that property prices in Brighton rocketed, leaving most of us without the prospect of ever having a place to call our own.

Oh, and by the way, he's a freemason... Wanker.



Steve Harmer-Strange:
Buy-to-let Baron of Brighton

By-Election Bust-up

The battle for control of Brighton Council heats up in the run up to the Goldsmid ward by-election on July 23.

The first casualty was Tory Councillor, Paul Lainchbury, who resigned after it was exposed that he hadn't attended a single council committee or community/resident meeting for a year.

Now, with the Tories on the ropes, the election looks set to upset the balance of power – after Lynchmeself's resignation the Tories now hold 25 seats and are supported by an independent while Labour holds 13 seats, the Greens 12 and the Lib Dems 2.

The dirty tricks began when Lynchmeself delayed his resignation long enough to use his decisive vote to give the nod to Ann Norman being elected mayor and Mary Mears being named council leader. Competition for the seat is increasing with the Greens looking strong following their 'Euro election success'. They clearly have Labour spooked; claiming that their latest election leaflet slanders Green candidate Alex Philips.

Meanwhile, the Tories face a challenge from UKIP candidate and radio presenter, Mike Mendoza – a man whose raging homophobia got him suspended from the airwaves in 2007 after an on-air rant in which he compared gays to paedophiles. While his prospects look none too bright, he could siphon off enough of the bigot vote to further damage Tory chances.

Looks like Mary 'I'll have a pound of spuds please' Mears is facing a year of struggling to even govern with an isolated minority.

i360=no£

The preposterously-named phallic tower we were promised, the i360, has hit the buffers due to a cash deficit of £20m.

This summer, the tower was meant to be fully erect and standing proud upon our sea-front with an observation doughnut sliding gracefully up and down the shaft. At 176 metres, it would have been the southeast's tallest building, beating the 171m Spinaker Tower in Portsmouth (see RM #9). Instead, it's currently at a height of 0mm.

David 'Groucho' Marks, whose firm Marks Barfield is behind the design and financing, said: "This is an ideal project and it's an ideal time to build it. We remain committed to it as we have always been."

So let's get this right – in a time when conspicuous consumption and grandstanding has been widely rejected in favour of austerity we're still trying to build bigger and better toys costing upwards of £40m? Is RM missing something?

BLOOMIN' 'ECK!

A gang of guerrilla gardeners* took over the old Esso site on Lewes Road on May 10 and transformed the gravel wasteland into a vibrant community garden. They even painted a tiger mural on the Co-op's wall – a grrreat antidote to Esso's 'tiger in your tank' bullshit.

An assortment of allotmenters, Patchfest organisers, Cowley Club rejects and green-fingered locals are determined to keep the garden open for as long as possible, despite a number of obstacles – not least the baking summer.

In early June, gardeners arrived one morning to find the gates locked and a security sign in place. This led to a petition to save the site, which collected over 3,000 signatures within just a few days. It also prompted Green Party Cllr Keith 'Bandwagon' Taylor to seek and gain 'permission' from London developers, Alburn Retail Ltd, for the garden to continue until Feb.

However, after all this it turned out the security sign was entirely spurious, probably nicked from some other yet-to-be reclaimed wasteland. Seems the whole thing was a hoax by a grouchy anonymous local, and nothing to do with the developers - but don't let that ruin a good story.

In another twist, Starbucks management came down in the same month asking if they could lend a hand. They offered to send four of their min-wage workers for the day, adding new currency to the phrases 'green wash' and 'hypocritical token gesture'. Needless to say, they were sent packing.

The neighbouring Co-op which has been raking it in hand-over-fist since the garden started up has been less overtly 'supportive', although checkout assistants have attended the fundraisers put on by Big Lemon Buses and Kenya West musicians, which is good to see.

Donations from the public have been plentiful – the garden has been given seeds, plants, planters, tools, gazebos, and benches made from reclaimed wood. There was even a big turf delivery that came all the way from Portsmouth after someone there caught a clip on the local news.

In fact, barely a day goes by when someone doesn't drop something off – which is fine when it's a small plant or seeds but problematic when it's a bag of clothes or sideboard ornaments. "Hey folks! We appreciate the effort, but it's a garden – the tip's up on Wilson Avenue" one indignant Digger told RM exclusively.

Here's hoping the guerilla spirit is as contagious as swine flu and that by the winter we've all got a chronic dose. What's that? There's another derelict Esso garage on Hollingdean Road?

*RM factfile: GG-ing dates back to the Diggers, who struggled for the right to cultivate land in the 17th century and was updated on May Day 2000 in London riot-style when Churchill's statue was given a turf mohican.

AXE WIELDING ALBION

As we foretold (RM#8) the destructive nature of the Albion's new stadium, going up on the South Downs as we speak, has been borne out.

Part of an ancient woodland – Westlain Plantation – was cut down to make way for, yep, you guessed it, a friggin car park off Village Way.

Permission for the work was granted at a meeting of Brighton Council's planning committee 'subject to stringent ecological controls'. So stringent that cars come before woodland.

The club worked hand-in-glove with Brighton Uni over this, agreeing to provide the university parking to replace spaces around campus which will be used for new stadium facilities.

Now we're not against football, but why this at the expense of the last remaining chalk grasslands in northern Europe – home to the giant toadflax and the adonis blue butterfly?

The current build is bound to attract more development which could eventually trash even more of this pristine landscape and turn the whole area into ribbon development hell..

Why Shoreham Harbour or the station site weren't chosen we'll never know. If you hear of anything else dodgy going on up at the Falmer site, be sure to email us.

FAIR TRADE TO FREE TRADE

Another pillar in Brighton's right-on, liberal reputation is in danger of collapse as the city is set to be the first to lose its stamp of approval from the Fair Trade organisation.

Five years ago, Brighton got its 'Fair Trade' status when the Council agreed to stock Fair Trade tea and coffee in its institutions (like the library) and encouraged companies to follow suit.

However, Green Councillor Rachel Fryer was recently told that penny-pinching Tories had dropped the measure to save costs. Not that they ran it past anyone – the Greens just noticed when Fair Trade coffee was no longer available at council canteens.

Despite the minimal financial impact the scheme has had on Council coffers, even the minor improvements to dirt-poor plantation workers' conditions is too much for some in the Council to stomach.

Now aware of the Council's breach of the scheme, The Fairtrade Foundation is reviewing Brighton's status, which has to be renewed every two years. None of the 426 towns and cities in the scheme has yet had its status withdrawn.

Two years ago the Council voted to give up its 'Peace Messenger' status when it came out Councillor Brian Fitch's globe-trotting as Secretary General of the messenger organisation cost the Council £2,000 a year (see RM #14).

EDO COURT CASE FRENZY

With so many EDO/ITT protestors up before the Beak it's difficult to know where to begin this round-up. Brighton Magistrates has almost become second home to support groups behind recent actions against the arms co. which supplied release-mechanisms for the US drones in the late June bombing of a Pakistani compound where 80 locals died.

The latest action by protestors since Brighton's Mayday mayhem, was a blockade during which they chained themselves to crowd barriers outside the gates. On a busy Monday morning in late June, this prevented access to the factory and forced EDO director Paul Hills to cut a hole in the fence around the factory to allow cars in. Nine people were arrested. Five of them were simply bystanders who had come as supporters.

The demonstration was timed to coincide with the end of the No Borders Camp in Calais, held to protest against the increasingly repressive immigration policy of France and the UK and the building of a UK detention centre on French soil.

Closer to home Robert Alford, who has been in Lewes Prison on remand since January for his alleged part in the decommissioning of EDO has been released from chokey. This leaves Elijah Smith as the last of the decommissioners on remand.

Meanwhile, notching up another legal victory for the campaign, Chris Bluemel who admitted chinning a cop at the Carnival Against the Arms Trade (June 2008) was found not guilty of assault on grounds that he acted in self-defence, after the court found police had used unlawful and excessive force by beating him with batons at the protest.

There are a number of cases pending which could all do with your court support. See www.smashedo.org.uk

What Is Rough Music?

Rough Music has been played for centuries as the downtrodden's discordant wail against oppression. Civil War Roundheads played merry hell with the bones of deposed aristocrats and we aim to resurrect this tradition with a vengeance!!!

Boss pissed you off? Dodgy dealings at the council? Are you Simon Fanshawe's P.A?

Perhaps you've got a story for Rough Music...

roughmusic@hotmail.co.uk
Rough Music c/o PO Box 74,
Brighton BN1 4XQ

Please donate - we're totally skint and running off the goodwill of readers