



Robin Hood Solidarity Newsletter

Community News Through Your Door

December 2013

■ This is the first edition of ROBIN HOOD SOLIDARITY NEWSLETTER, produced by the Robin Hood Solidarity Group. It's a local newsletter about local stories and issues that are relevant to us who live in this neighbourhood. It is for residents, by residents.

If you have something you want say: a story you want to write, a story that we could write with you, or a comment about this newsletter, get in touch at info@robinhoodsolidarity.org.uk or call on 07747431859.

WHO IS THE ROBIN HOOD SOLIDARITY GROUP?

We are a group of Forest Fields residents who are tired of feeling isolated within our community and powerless over our lives. Living in Forest Fields means we all have some things in common. We share the same streets, buy our food from the same shops, often have the same landlords or work in similar jobs. This means that we often suffer from similar problems, such as debt, poor housing or unemployment. But we often face these problems alone, even though our neighbours may have the same worries. We believe that to come up with solutions to the problems we face in our everyday lives, we need to work together as a community to support each other and take control of our lives.

WHAT WE DO.

We will begin running a weekly drop-in session every Tuesday 10am - 2pm starting on 7th January 2014 at the Forest Fields Advice Centre, 69 Wiverton Rd NG7 6NU. We will be opening the space for group and one-on-one problem sharing and practical problem solving sessions on the issues that affect us in our daily lives (whether that's to do with debt, landlords, benefits, employment, stop and search, or whatever else). We offer information and problem solving if we can and if not we'll point you towards helpful groups in Nottingham and elsewhere who can.

NEW COMMUNITY CENTRE TO OPEN IN FOREST FIELDS

■ Early spring is the planned opening of the newly refurbished and resurrected community centre in Forest Fields. The centre, which is behind Forest Fields Primary School, has been closed now for more than a year. The centre will be run by a consortium of local community groups. What the centre is used for – whether it is a space for baby and parents groups, kids clubs, ESOL classes, Asian youth or whatever else – will largely depend on this consortium.

There is so little space that people in the community can use in Forest Fields, and opening a new centre here at a time when welfare resources are being further and systematically decimated is an opportunity worth grabbing. Giving a centre like this a new lease of life could be a really useful resource that could help us to help ourselves as a community. If it is used by – and useful for – different parts of the Forest Fields community, then it could be a much needed injection of energy into the neighbourhood.

But there is always the risk that it will serve the interests of a select few and, if this is the case, ultimately fail to be what it says it is: a community hub. In particular, local politics can make things difficult. With community projects like this one, the usual practice of the council is to tender out the contract to competing groups, with one group coming out on top. When this happens, power tends to get concentrated in the hands of a few, with the residents having little say over what takes place. More often than not, the group is not even rooted in the local area.

As a means of making sure this doesn't happen, earlier in November Toby Neal, Carol Jones and Mohammed Ibrahim, the councillors representing Berridge Ward on Notts City Council, called a meeting and invited a bunch of community groups to discuss plans for the centre and the idea of co-operating as a consortium. Bringing groups together in this way is a positive step that could be a remedy to the usual political pitfalls. But we are concerned by some parts of the process so far. Why was it that almost half of the people who attended the meeting were not

residents of Forest Fields? When will there be a chance for people living in the neighbourhood (beyond those involved in community groups) to have their say on this centre? How will residents be able to have a say over how the centre is run and, more importantly, what the space is used for? In the coming months there are likely to be more meetings, including a public meeting some time in the new year. We're holding out hope that the community centre will really be a space that is run by, and benefits, the local community. After all, what else is it there for? Lets hold our councillors to their claim to want it to be such a space.

ZERO HOUR CONTRACTS

■ Working class families are currently facing a three pronged attack on their employment rights. First, workfare was introduced by the Labour government as a tool to force unemployed people into working for their benefits. It richly rewards large corporations who no longer have to pay many of their workers. Next came the dismantling of the benefits system in an effort to push everyone who needs support to survive to accept less, in the form of Universal Credit. And now the very same companies which have benefited from workfare are pushing zero-hour contracts onto the few employees they still pay.

A zero-hour contract states that, whilst the employee must be available to work at all times, they are not guaranteed any work. If they say no to any work offered (even if it's at twenty minutes notice) they will be breaking their contract, and so they can be disciplined or even fired. On the other hand, the employer has no obligation whatsoever towards the employee – if they don't want to provide work they don't have to. They can retain employees without paying them any money whatsoever for months on end. In recent months JD Sports has been highlighted as one of the many large companies who are exploiting their workers in this way, but there are many others.

Of course, the flexibility of zero-hours contracts may suit some workers who want occasional earnings. It is very clear, however, that this flexibility favours businesses over workers. It means that businesses no longer need to make expensive redundancies in the lean times which, perhaps coincidentally, also makes government employment statistics look much more favourable. After all, even if someone hasn't worked for weeks, if they are engaged on a zero-hours contract they are not technically unemployed, and nor are they eligible for Job Seekers Allowance. The introduction of Universal Credit, in addition to the ever growing restrictions on trade unions, means that the constant attack on our rights as workers is growing every day. We are being asked now, more than ever

before, to fight amongst each other for crumbs as real jobs which can support families disappear and fake jobs which can support no one take their place. Over the last few months workers at JD sports have been fighting against Zero Hour contracts, and as more and more companies begin to implement this abusive employment system other workers will begin to fight back. They will be able to look to employees at Hovis who have successfully taken strike action to beat back zero-hour contracts. They've shown that it's possible to fight and it's possible to win. What employers like the bosses at Hovis fear most is not bad publicity, it's the anger that's building on their shop floors. There is potential for working class traditions – unions, strikes and solidarity – to assert themselves powerfully as employees get a feel for their own strength.

WHAT HAVE OUR BRAVE BOYS IN BLUE BEEN UP TO?

■ Well, locally, as ever they seem to be focused on harassing the youth. Whether its snooping on them with their CCTV van or moving them along from their hang-out spots. Its very worrying when these young people are talked about as 'perpetrators' who are somehow an 'other' to 'residents.' Lets not forget that these young people live here too.

In other news, Nottinghamshire Chief Constable Chris Eyre admits that the Police are not doing enough to challenge racism within the Force, "The Police Service as a whole needs to do more to recruit people from a range of different backgrounds to ensure policing accurately reflects the communities we serve." If only it were that simple. Unfortunately we see ongoing proof that Nottinghamshire Police are an institution rotten to their core, with internal racism normal and unfair policing rife. In 2010 Nottinghamshire Police was named the worst performing force in England and Wales. While back in May the Sunday Times reported that Nottinghamshire police had been attempting to solve crimes by "rounding up the 'usual suspects' without any evidence." This behaviour has become standard particularly with the rise of 'stop-and-search' powers used by the police, which seems to be used against anyone for any reason, but is regularly used to terrorise black and asian youth in our communities.

Please feel free to get in touch with any ideas for articles, projects or just if you want to ask us anything:

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