

Workfare ain't Fair

Workfare is when unemployed people are forced to work for their benefits. It is an attack on the unemployed and also against workers whose paid work is undermined. Workfare means that those who need welfare are forced into unpaid work for multimillion pound companies. Instead of a living wage, they receive only Job Seekers Allowance - a tiny £53 a week for the under- 25s - far below the minimum wage. The companies themselves don't have to pay a penny. Workfare means that those in paid positions may see their jobs replaced by this unpaid labour. Why would a company pay for people to do these jobs when they can get free labour from the Job Centre? It's clear that these work programmes are another attack by the rich on the poor. We need to unite to fight back against the rich bosses and government officials who think we'll take this lying down. If you're being forced into workfare or think you might be sometime soon, then contact autonomoussnott@riseup.net as we'll soon be organising some public meetings to fight back against workfare.

Nottingham Solidarity Network

Unpaid wages? Denied deposit? Unsafe workplace? Refused repairs? Don't let bosses and landlords use and abuse you!

We are a network of working people and tenants who work to defend ourselves through direct action and mutual support. Nottingham Solidarity Network will help you get back stolen wages and deposits, get repairs made, and stop evictions. We are a collection of Nottingham residents who have lived in the city for a number of years. We are all volunteers and anybody who wishes to show solidarity is able to join us. Each of us at some time has suffered from unjust treatment by employers, landlords, or other wealthy people who hold power over our lives.

We've learned from experience that the only way we'll be treated fairly, equally, and with dignity is by being prepared to stand up to such people and defend our rights. It's hard to do this alone. That's why we've come together, and we're seeking out other local people with similar problems who feel the same way. Together we can find ways of dealing with abusive bosses, greedy landlords, and those who would deny us, our friends, families, neighbors and co-workers the right to a decent life. call 07423631681 or email nsn@riseup.net

Some info on dealing with cops

Witnessed an arrest or assault by police? Take notes of what happened asap. Find other witnesses and contact us: email nottsdefence@riseup.net or tweet @nottsdefence

Further advice on <https://network23.org/nottsdefence>

If arrested:

- 1) Reply NO COMMENT to ALL questions at ALL times. 2) You may refuse to give name, address and DOB, but this will delay your release.
- 3) You have the right to have someone told of your arrest. 4) You have the right to get free legal advice (we recommend Banner Jones).
- 5) You have the right to see a doctor if you are sick or hurt. 6) Ask to read the PACE code.

After your release:

Take notes of what happened ASAP.

If you were assaulted by the police see a doctor ASAP.

Get a written report on and photograph any injuries.

The Forest Fields Fire

Issue number 3- May

A free newsletter for residents by residents

Local Election and Mayoral Votes come in and Nottingham says, "you've got to be kidding, like it even matters."

According to the Nottingham Post and Nottingham City Council, the big news is that Nottingham has voted 'No' to having an elected Mayor. However, only 23.9% of people voted overall, a figure that sank to as low as 8.5% in the Arboretum ward. Isn't the real story here that the political system is disconnected from 76.1% of people in Nottingham?

After a desperate campaign by Jon Collins to cling onto power, including scare leaflets being handed out in ethnic minority neighbourhoods, Labour anti-Mayor leaflets being sent out to everyone in the city, and local Labour MPs having last minute conversions to the anti-Mayor cause, they have got what they wanted. We will continue to be ruled by Jon Collins, a leader selected by the local Labour party, not the electorate. Technically speaking, they're off the hook.

But there is a real crisis bubbling away under the surface. The campaigning around the issue of the Mayor brought the bubbling resentments of Nottingham people to the fore. In a totally Labour dominated city (50 Labour councillors with an opposition of just 5 Tories), the Labour candidate nearly always wins. In most areas, whoever the local party select as their candidate is guaranteed to be selected. Elections are just a formality. And even if you do manage to elect someone else, they will have no ability to change policy within the Council at large, given the enormous Labour majority. This has inevitably contributed to the enormous sense of disenchantment with the political process that results in such high abstention rates.

But it's not just the Nottingham political landscape that is a problem. Over the past few decades the politics of the big parties have become increasingly homogeneous, dictated more by the needs of neoliberal global capitalism than by any engagement with the interests of their supporters. Whoever you vote for, the capitalist system wins. Given that this system has far more impact on our lives than any of the window dressing with policies parties engage in, it's unsurprising increasing numbers of people are choosing not to engage with the charade of democracy.

So, Jon Collins continues to have a disproportionate say in how our lives work, not because we want him to, but simply because more of the minority who are still engaged in the political process (13.7% of people in the city) don't want change than those who do.

Whether we have a Leader of the Council or a Mayor, we still have almost no say in most important decisions about how the city works and still less in how the country and the world works. I think it's time we started stripping power away from these unrepresentative politicians and involving everyone in the decision-making process.

Meeting about Police Stop and Search

Last month the Public and Commerical Services union's regional Black Members Network organised a meeting about the use of police stop and search powers. Around 50 people attended with contributions from as far afield as London and Birmingham.

The first speakers was a criminal solicitor from Thompsons (who do a lot of work for trade unions). He gave a talk about the law on stop and search, ostensibly so that people knew what their rights were. However, he only discussed section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE), which is just one of the search powers available to police officers. He also clearly had little or no practical experience of how stop and search powers are used on the street. At one point he even suggested that if police did not follow the correct procedure and give you a reason for the search you had the option of simply walking away.

Anybody wanting to understand their rights and learn how to deal with the police during searches would have found the guidance given the following day by Green and Black Cross at the legal observer training at the Sumac far more useful.

The second speaker was more practical. A woman from London she talked about the use of section 60 "stop and account" laws against her local community. Unlike the powers set out in PACE, section 60 of the Public Order Act 1986 doesn't require that the police have "reasonable suspicion" that the person they are searching has committed or is about to commit an offence. Originally intended for use against football hooligans it can be used against anybody within a defined area.

She encouraged people not to simply walk past when they saw somebody being hassled by the police. It is important that people know they have support and that the police know they are being watched.

At this point the floor was opened for speakers. One member of the audience said that they were hoping to run for Police and Crime Commissioner in November and wondered how people thought this role could be used to hold the police to account. The response of the audience made it clear that people had little interest in working with the police, something they no longer believe is of any value. The anger of many contributors was palatable.

A third speaker had come from the Birmingham Racial Attack Monitoring Unit (BRAMU) and talked about the myth of a post-racist society. Pointing to research which shows that there have been 96 racially motivated murders since the death of Stephen Lawrence. He stressed the importance of stop and search which precipitated the execution of Mark Duggan and last summer's riots. He suggested that the issue was so serious that a "state of emergency" be declared.

The final speakers were the parents of a Nottingham family who had been harassed by Notts Police, culminating in two of their sons being stopped and searched outside their home. Surrounded by armed police, police dogs and assorted other officers, the two were forced to strip to their underwear, while neighbours who came out to see what was going on were told to go back inside by the police. One neighbour had managed to capture the event on a mobile phone and although it was difficult to make out what was going on, the sheer scale of the police operation was clear.

There was an extended discussion about what needs to be done with people keen that the event not simply become a "talking shop." Lots of ideas were suggested, but despite assurances this would be the first of many meetings, the only concrete action was the collection of people's email addresses to set-up a network. This seems a small thing, but I realise that it is difficult to move straight from a meeting to an organisation and there did seem to be a commitment to ensure this was a beginning rather than the end.

Whatever the outcome, I think it was important to bring people together about this important issue and reassure the victims that they are not alone. I was particularly impressed to see that this was organised by the PCS, demonstrating that unions are capable of organising around issues beyond the immediate workplace concerns. Hopefully this can be built on within (and beyond) other unions.

Lenton Flats Update

Over the past few weeks Lenton Flats residents and Autonomous Nottingham have organised a couple of meetings in order for the residents to come together to share their grievances, anger and frustration at the behaviour of Nottingham City Homes, Nottingham City Council and the plans to demolish Lenton Flats. These meetings have been disrupted by NCH, the council and other organisations who are funded by the council.

At the first meeting organised around 30 people attended, the main theme was that of confusion and frustration. As the residents expressed their concerns it drew light on the piss poor way in which NCH have communicated with the residents, apparently dropping the occasional letter threw the mail box telling you you're going to get evicted, your home demolish and yes, we'll be in touch soon to help find you a new house, is a reasonable way for NCH to treat its tenants. We'd decided at the start of the meeting not to impose our position on the meeting. A resident had got in touch with us, and asked us to help arrange the meetings, but we're not residents and whilst we'll show solidarity with the residents we didn't feel it was our place to be guiding the fight. Unfortunately one local charity/ community worker, funded in part by City Homes decided it was her role. She admitted to receiving a call from the council asking her to attend the meeting, and it was clear that she saw her role as eviction mediator. Framing her opinion as objective and omnipotent she constantly invalidated any residents attempts at discussing resistance, individualised each persons situation by offering help finding suitable accommodation to a select few and repeating NCH's corporate lines over and over again. Despite this many residents continued to express their anger at the way they are being treated, and most were steadfast that everything the council or NCH tell them is a lie.

- If the eviction goes ahead hardly any of the residents will be able to stay in Lenton, instead a community will be dispersed across the city.

- There isn't enough social housing in the city to accommodate those who currently need it, so their is zero chance of their being enough for the 500 household currently living in lenton flats.

- If the flats are demolished the current residents know that the land will sold off and within a few years new student accommodation will take it's place.

A week after that meeting another was held, this one was attended by 20 or so people, including handful of the same residents who came to the previous meeting, two from Autonomous Notts, and then bizarrely 2 NCH workers, the local area manager, and another council representaive. Fortunately we'd been tipped off about council presence, and also decided that we'd made a mistake in allowing the previous meeting to be unstructured. We'd been asked to help create a forum for residents to talk about fighting back against NCH's plans, and in silencing ourselves we'd allowed someone to hijack the meeting from the residents. So, we explained at the beginning that this was a meeting for residents to talk and for non-residents to listen. The first half of the meeting went in this direction with residents discussing the variety of ways they're connected to the flats and the area in general, as well as their distrust in the explanations given to them by Nottingham city homes and the council. There was also wider concern and anger at the ways in which they have constantly been treated by goverment bodies, both local and national, and looking ahead at other ways they're about to be screwed over. NCH representatives interrupted in order to recite the line that management has drilled into them, and they in turn were occasionally taken to task by different residents who saw through their bull shit. At a couple of points during the NCH blahdeblah we lost our tempers and ranted back at them. At the time we thought this was a fuck up, but after the meeting it turned out to be the smartest thing we could have done. Once we'd made clear in no uncertain terms what we thought of NCH and the council, the residents in private were even more vocal about what they thought about the entire situation. The meeting ended slowly with things coming to a collective impasse, of the residents either resigned to being treated the way that city council always treat their residents, and others seething and disbelieving and with a willingness to fight on.

Autonomous Notts would like to thank the current residents for their general awesomeness in the face of oppression, and we will continue to show solidarity to all those who want it. More meetings will happen and we won't let city homes or the council anywhere near them. Ironically nearly all residents told us that they now new more about the eviction process and they now knew more about the rehousing plans then they did after the meetings city homes had put organised. Make of that what you will.