

EAST END HOWLER



For
Community
and
Solidarity.

East London's FREE Working Class News Sheet.

Issue 4

INSPIRING TEACHERS STRIKE

The FE sector is sitting on a £1.04 bn reserve and yet this is happening! Support the strike!

As we write the strike at Tower Hamlets College is in its fourth week and shows no signs of weakening. It is the first continuous teachers' strike in the UK for 12 years. The strike is at all four sites of the College: Arbour Square, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Poplar. The dispute broke out at the College after new Principal Michael Farley, who is on £160,000 a year (!) decided to axe the staff teaching budget. Farley and the governors claimed that 40 teachers would need to be sacked despite a College reserve fund of £6 million! (not to mention that one of the governors has a personal fortune of 150 million) To save all these jobs outright would only have cost £150,000 from the College coffers, less than 5% of resources.

Places for the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses have also been hit badly by the new Principal and his cost-cutting agenda. This programme provides vital learning support for London's poorest peoples, and acts as an important facility to integrate ethnically diverse communities. This is why there was outrage when the College announced it was to strip 1,000 places for students.

The teachers at Tower Hamlets have stopped the slicing and dicing of management in its tracks after 13 of the originally planned 40 workers were given compulsory redundancies. Their union UCU has taken the position that all 13 jobs will have to be re-instated before any agreement is discussed or the first murmuring is heard of picket lines to be coming down. This shows the unity and solidarity present at the strike. Teacher and UCU joint branch Secretary Mark Winter stated 'There will be no drift back to work. We are rock solid, we're here to win'. He added, 'we reject the 'Ryanair' approach from management. We are here



to defend the community, education and the students. We believe we are winning.'

The community has responded to the rallying cry of the teachers and is playing a terrific role in the dispute. Over 9 days a delegation of strikers has managed to raise £10,000 from the local area. Contributions have been made from local businesses, partners of staff, FBU branches and branches from the CWU. Other UCU branches indirectly involved in the dispute have also given generously to the fighting fund. The networking done by members of the UCU involved in the strike has been of an admirably high standard and other unions are displaying the kind of solidarity that gives great encouragement to working class unity. Postal workers are even refusing to deliver to mail to any of sites at Tower Hamlets College. Local individuals are also supporting the teachers financially and wherever they can. One corner shop is storing signs and placards whenever the strikers are off

duty.

It is due to the swift action of UCU members that the strike has been such a success. UCU branch members immediately began preparing for strike action after learning of the Principal's intentions at the end of the last academic year.

Show your support:

1) Visit the picket lines

Poplar High Street, E14
Arbour Square, E1
Bethnal Green Road, E2

2) Send messages of support:

Richard McEwan 07532 364 638
Alison Lord alord@tower.ac.uk
John Budis jbudis@tower.ac.uk
Roberto Foth
roberto.foth@tower.ac.uk

3) Email the college principal – michael.farley@tower.ac.uk and tell him what you think

4) Take a collection at work.

Send it to: Strike fund, c/o Keith Priddle, Tower Hamlets College, Arbour Square, London E1 0PT

GET YOUR HOUSING RIGHTS IN NEWHAM

Back in late June members of Action East End ran the “Gatekeeping Roadshow” outside Stratford Local Services Centre. The Gatekeeping Roadshow is London Coalition Against Poverty’s (LCAP) London-wide series of demos challenging the councils’ practice of “Gatekeeping”. We had a table where we gave out juice, party rings, bubbles, and, of course, leaflets letting people know their Housing Rights.

Gatekeeping is when a council refuses to accept a homelessness application and/or provide temporary accommodation when they have a lawful duty to do so. This can take the form of discouraging people from

making an application in the first place by making them believe that they have no right to housing when this is not necessarily the case.

In all other boroughs the Gatekeeping Roadshow targeted the Housing Options Centres (what used to be Homeless Persons Units or HPUs) where housing claims are dealt with. In Newham, people can be gatekept before they even reach the Housing Options Centre. The process is that people are meant to go to one of the Local Services Centres around the borough, where, if deemed eligible, they are then referred on to the Housing Options Centre.

The East End Howler called the Newham helpline posing as a homeless 19yr old

asking where I would need to go to make a homelessness application. I was told that because of my age I was not eligible and that I

should not even bother going to the Local Services Centre to make an application! They didn’t ask any other questions regarding the rest of the “5 tests” (see info on that below). So it seems that gatekeeping in Newham is even happening on the phone. The man on the phone called it “A kind of vetting process”.

So the Gatekeeping Roadshow in Newham happened outside Stratford Local Services Centre where people are people fobbed off from making their homelessness applications before they even reach the Housing Options

Queen Mary’s Autonomous Group (QMAG) who was a great help. We gave out information on homelessness rights, took anonymous surveys on claimants’ experiences in dealing with the council, and just generally chatted.

We had a contact list for people who wanted to stay in touch with LCAP and get to in touch with each other to work together against gatekeeping. Many people assumed that this was some kind of petition to sign- but a petition is an appeal to the Government to make things better, and we don’t trust the Government to do anything in the interests of poor people.

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THE 5 TESTS:

- 1 Are you homeless?**
This includes people who will become homeless within the next 28 days or are badly or unsafely housed as well as those who are on the streets (e.g. if you can’t stay in your home because you are experiencing violence there).
- 2 Are you eligible?**
Does your immigration status allow you to be housed by a public authority? Do you have recourse to public funds?
- 3 Are you in priority need?**
Some people are automatically in priority need – e.g. pregnant women, people with children, 16 & 17 year olds, 18-20 year olds who have been in care and people who have been made homeless by an emergency such as a flood. Others will have to show that their problems make them ‘vulnerable’ – e.g. someone who has serious mental health problems, or someone who is elderly may be vulnerable.
- 4 Are you intentionally homeless?**
If the Council think it is your fault you are homeless, then they may only have to house you for a very short time while they help you find your own accommodation.
- 5 Local Connection**
This is the LAST thing a council should consider and not the first! If you don’t have a local connection with the borough where you are applying and you have one with somewhere else, the Council may tell the borough where you have a connection to house you. But they can only do this AFTER they have investigated your case and made a decision about whether you pass the first 4 tests.

WHAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD DO:

If the council has *reason to believe* you may be homeless now or within the next 28 days, they MUST take your application and start investigating the 5 tests. This application is not the same thing as being put on the housing register. At the end of their investigation they MUST give you a written decision about your case.

If the council also has *reason to believe* you may be eligible and in priority need, then they MUST house you while they look into the 5 tests in more detail.

“Reason to believe” is not the same as proof or evidence. A recent case in the high court said that if a person goes to a Homeless Persons Unit to get help, this is enough in itself to give the Council reason to believe the person may be homeless.

WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DO:

Councils often do everything they can to refuse to or delay in housing people even if there is clearly reason to believe they may be homeless, eligible and in priority need. These are some of the things council’s say to try to turn you away:

- They can’t help until they’ve done a home visit sometime in the future
- They can’t help until you’ve actually been evicted by the bailiffs
- They won’t help until you bring in a doctors report
- They won’t help until you’ve gone through mediation (for example with your parents to see if they will change their mind about throwing you out)
- They won’t help until you show a police report about the violence you’ve been suffering

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Experience has shown us that the best way to fight for our rights is to work together, collectively, and demand what we have a right to.

Whether it be at the housing office, the jobcentre, or the workplace. If you're affected by gatekeeping and want to work together with other people in the same boat to fight for what you're entitled to, then get in touch with London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) and they will work to set up meetings which can then evolve into an effective campaign

Recently LCAP set up a Tower Hamlets branch of the coalition, TOWCAP, who say that "it's a local group of LCAP that was set up to campaign around poverty issues in the east end. We're looking forward to be campaigning against HPU gatekeeping and supporting other housing initiatives in Tower Hamlets."

Across the welfare state the government is working to make it harder for people who are trying to get by in an already difficult system. If you are unlucky enough to have been on a New Deal course for those on Jobseeker's Allowance or Incapacity Benefit you will have experienced this first hand- either by sitting in a room full of old computers 'learning' about how to get work or even working for free on a work placement. The Welfare Reform Bill will make things harder.

It will involve, among other things, phasing out income support, cutting Incapacity Benefit, and increasing benefit sanctions on non-compliant claimants. But people are already beginning to organise. There are Claimant's Groups in Haringey and Hackney where people are joining together to get what they need from the Jobcentre.



Queens Market– Still up and running after the successful campaign to save it from developers. Market chairman Neil Stockwell (pictured) says that it's still at threat from a proposed bid from an American multi-national.

There was a Newham Claimant's Group but we've been unable to get in touch with them. If you are on state benefits and would like to be part of such a group get in touch with us at the Howler and we'll put you in touch with each other.

Read the Welfare Reform Bill at

<http://www.commonleader.gov.uk/output/page2663.asp>

Get in touch with Tower Hamlets Coalition Against Poverty towcap.secretary@lcap.org.uk

Check out London Coalition Against Poverty www.lcap.org.uk

UP THE CREEK

Plans to give access to boat transport on the Bow Back Rivers seem to have run aground.

It was originally planned to deliver tons of material to the Olympics site by barge (about 500 to 1,000 tonnes of aggregate per day). But according to Contract Journal only a handful of test deliveries have taken place in the last year.

Deliveries have been apparently delayed because of the lateness in completing the lock at the Prescott Channel. Now shipping firms are saying that the delay meant that they lost out to rail freight operators.

David Allen at shipping firm Allen C Bennett & Sons said: that they were: not too optimistic about getting work now because we have missed 12 months while the groundworks have been going on. Also the price of secondary aggregates has plummeted along with the cost of road haulage and there

are six trains a day going in there which is a huge amount." But this makes East End Howler ask the question: If it was so easy to bring the material in by rail, why was nothing said about British Waterways delay in finishing the works at Prescott Channel Lock with an expensive and what seems now totally unnecessary 21 million pounds scheme? Why did all this expense and disruption to the waterways take place in the first place?? The Olympics site is right next to a major railhead at Stratford, something glaringly obvious to most people.

Could it be that really any barge deliveries weren't really going to take place and that the real aim is to create marina style moorings for waterside dwellings for the rich City workers as the 'Water City' development?

Colin Edwards of the Inland Waterways Association interestingly said that ...

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...on-commercial vessels will also benefit from the lock project and the constant water level, whilst a cross-bench peer, Andrew Mawson said in the House of Lords in January : "The Olympics have the potential to act as a catalyst to lift the game on the £20bn of development that will take place down the valley over the next 20 years...."

and "turn round the fortunes of the Lower Lea Valley and build what we called the Water City - a practical vision that would use many miles of waterways in the Lower Lea Valley to lift land values and once again drive the economy of east London".

In the long run, British Waterways hopes to see "a new East End Amsterdam which is fully accessible for boats and people and incorporates wildlife habitats and high quality waterside parkland."



One local estate agent was quoted as saying a canal view would add £15,000 to the price of a third- or fourth-floor property in the area.

"If we get water going through in the right places and not up through the floor it might be superb for us". Instead of being a navigation authority, British Waterways seems more interested in being a property developer. Mark Stephens, of Brit-

ish Waterways has already said that "if the need for big barges should ever end, the lock could be adapted to make it more suitable for small craft," and that "the restored waterways could be used to carry waste and recycles from new homes established in the area, as well as attracting increased leisure boat activity - trip boats, water taxis, floating restaurants, houseboats and visiting craft".

DEVELOPERS AND INVESTORS VS THE REST OF US

Barratt Homes has unveiled the plans for the next phase of its St Andrew development by Bromley-by-Bow tube. A massive public relations campaign is underway, aimed to ensure the support of the 'local community'. The publicity material that has come through the letter box of area residents is full of carefully considered public relations ploys such as sponsoring the local football team. They would have us believe that the main thing Barratt is concerned about is to serve the local community with high quality homes that people can rent or part buy, as well as provide local services.



However, if you look at the publicity material (see above) aimed at the buyers of the majority of units...

High Density Living— the plans for the development.

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...which will not be for rent of sale at so-called affordable prices, then you get a different picture. The next phases of the development include two huge tower blocks- one 27 stories high. The advertisements highlight the proximity of the development to the new Olympic Park and stress what a good 'investment' these apartments will make. So depending on who you are- the public relations team will give out different messages.

These developments are springing up all over London. The strategic plans of the London Development Co-operation are for thousands of new 'homes' to be built. However, there are two issues here. Firstly, 'homes' is increasingly meaning 'flat' in a crowded high rise, not exactly what Londoners aspire to. Less and less actual houses are being built because more money can be made by crowding more people into high rises on the same bit of land. The key word now being used is 'high density'.

This was seen in the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens Estate by the Blackwall Tunnel. According to a local councillor Paul Briscoe, "Underlying the whole exercise is the desire to get as much density on the site as possible and the consultation was geared to that end," Briscoe explains. "English Partnerships wants to clear the site as quickly as possible to increase density."

He is critical of the current plan to put in 3,000 residential units, some in high rise towers. "It's not good planning as far as I am concerned; we already have 8,000 units in the pipeline for the area. There has to be a limit to how much we can squeeze in. There's a real danger of overdoing it and not creating a sustainable community in the long term."

Shirley Magnitsky has campaigned relentlessly against the demolition and the Blackwall Reach Regeneration Project. "It's got nothing to do with the design. The homes are run down because the council won't spend money on them. This is a prime spot.



Would you like your estate decanted Sir? - Residents of The Carpenters Estate, which overlooks the Olympic development, have been gradually asked to move out by the council who claim that they cannot afford to maintain the estate. Are you involved in the campaign to save the estate?

Get in touch with us at actioneastend@gmail.com

That's why they want to build 3,000 more homes here. The whole thing is about location and money."(Information from an article by Rory Olcatyto, February 29, 2008 in BD magazine)

Though homes aren't being demolished for the St Andrews Development, the same logic applies. Rather than build houses on the site, they choose to cram as many people as possible onto the land. The so-called affordable housing is but a smoke-screen for their real aim of cashing in on the Olympics and the demand for luxury housing in a prime site. Property investors will most likely be the main buyers in such a development- buying low and the selling high as the area takes off.

Secondly, it is questionable whether developments such as St. Andrews are actually needed to house Londoners. It seems odd to walk around London and see so many empty office blocks and 'To Let' signs on a variety of houses and flats. This is certainly the case around Bromley-by-Bow itself.

The only explanation for the continued expansion of new high rise developments is that more money is to be made this way. No one will force property speculators and landlords to actually do anything with the properties already there and vacant, so the way to get new homes built is to let developers such as Barratt have...

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...free rein. They get hand-outs from government to build the 'affordable housing' and token community services. They can then hide their real intentions behind the facade of 'providing houses for the local community'. Meanwhile, they can blackmail local government into granting planning permission for their main aim which is to tap into the luxury housing market. St. Andrews is in a prime location to attract investors thinking about cashing in on the Olympics and also the newly expanded transport links.

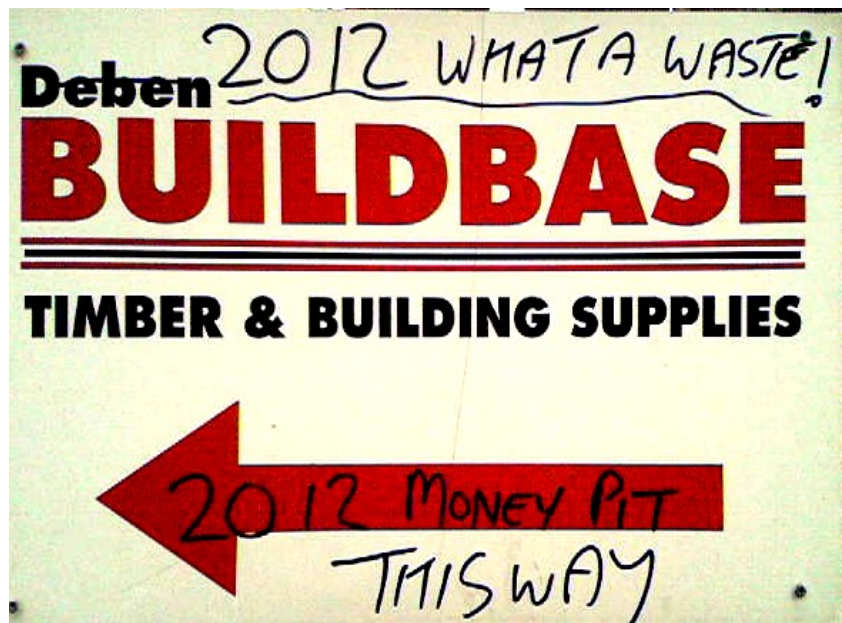
The end result is East London is becoming transformed from an area of terraced houses and gardens and local high streets to one of towering high rises and supermarkets, with the occasional sterile green space thrown in. There is not doubt that east London needs improved housing and services but there must be a better way of doing this. However, as long as profit is the main motivating force behind new developments all we are going to get is more such developments.

Barratt set up its own Working Group, chaired by the Construction Director. It supposedly consists of representatives of different parts of the community. However, when asked which local groups they actually consulted with, Barratt was unable to give a clear answer. The only name given was a development quango- Leaside Regeneration, hardly representative of your average local resident. Certainly, my comments at the so-called consultation evening received very little sympathy or consideration.

Barratt has not yet received complete planning permission for these next phases. Let them know your views at info@standrewsbromleybybow.co.uk.

London Education Workers Group

The London Education Workers Group is a grassroots direct action organisation formed so that education workers can come together to oppose the coming assault on education. We reject the division of workers into separate unions and recognise that politicians, political parties, and union bureaucrats have nothing to offer us.
LondonEWG@gmail.com



What a waste! - Graffiti down by the Carpenter's Estate, on the road leading to the Olympic Development.



We at **Action East End** want to see an alternative, one based on a genuine sense of community and solidarity.

Action East End is a local group based in East London that wants to contribute to the resistance, both defending ourselves in our communities and workplaces, but ultimately helping coordinate activities to improve our quality of life. This we believe can only be done through our own initiatives, outside the agenda of the local authorities or political groups, and by taking collective action for ourselves.

This is no flight of fancy but the basis from which radical change springs, and we would urge others to join us or get in touch at: actioneastend@gmail.com

actioneastend.blogspot.com

