



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER HACKNEYED OLD...

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 13th January 2006

Free/Donation

Issue 527



HACKED OFF

SQUATTED CAFE RESISTS HACKNEY COUNCIL SELL-OFF

There's a gold rush afoot in east London, and we're not invited. Also left in the cold is Sicilian café-owner Tony Platia who, together with other locals in the borough of Hackney, has recently re-occupied Francesca's Café, his business of 30 years, after being booted out last summer. It was one of many premises sold from under tenants' feet as the Council scrambled to dispose of their property over the last few years.

Now the shop front has turned frontline, barricaded in the battle to halt an ongoing stampede of investors and speculators, trailing a stench of corruption in their wake that would make Robert Mugabe blush. Tony had right of first refusal and tried to buy his place – but his cheques somehow kept getting lost in the post before they reached the Council. You, too, could get a slice of the real estate pie – if you don't mind furnishing the right officials with a few back-handers.

Francesca's Cafe, at 34 Broadway Market, E8, was bought in 2003 by multi-millionaire investor Roger Wratten, in order to build a block of luxury flats. From his mansion in Kent, Wratten is currently under investigation by the Inland Revenue for money laundering and tax evasion. Still, he's managed to buy up a rash of properties across the borough, including 2 Broadway Market, until recently the site of Little Georgia, another popular, local caff. Last August, the very day Wratten was supposed to sign a lease with the café's live-in manager, Tikka, he abruptly raised his asking price – three days later, he turned up early in the morning and turfed her on to the street.

"If we'd been in Sicily," Tony assures us, "none of this would've happened. I've lost my home, I've lost my business, I've lost everything. How can I accept that?" Indeed, he didn't take it lying down. It took 50 cops and 10 bailiffs to evict him the first time, last July. Since he re-occupied the café on November 27th, he's tapped a deep vein of local frustration and outrage at the Council, and Hackney residents have rallied around.

Other ex-Council tenants have come forward with similar stories of being swindled out of their homes and livelihoods. Shoppers have donated food, cash and blankets to Francesca's. A regular face at the café is Betty Shanks, Mayor of Hackney in 1985, who's demanded the Council remove her photo from their walls in disgust. The occupied café now boasts a 20 foot scaffold tripod rising from its roof, ready to help the more nimble occupiers evade the bailiffs.

Wratten Boroughs

The current wave of gentrification that's bringing Wratten such rich pickings is down to the combination of a local real estate bonanza, and a cash-strapped council desperate to flog off its assets. Hackney Council has proved hugely successful, over the years, at throwing away money on ill-fated management schemes. Aiming to get out of the red in the second half of the 90s, Hackney flogged £30 million of its own property, in keeping with a series of privatisations among London councils at the time. Nurseries and libraries tumbled to the ground, swimming pools evaporated, and all manner of voluntary advice and advocacy groups shut up shop.

But still the council wasted cash. A botched attempt to outsource social security benefits left it £36 million out of pocket. And its failed 'Transforming Hackney' programme of institutional change led to an accounting cock-up which, we're led to believe, meant that when the auditors arrived in 2001, they found a financial 'black hole' of £72 million.

From then on, central government turned the screw, the funding cuts got deeper, the sell-offs accelerated (See 'Hackney Not 4 Sale' article, SchNEWS of the World). At the same time, with a still burgeoning London population, newly-extended underground line and the 2012 London Olympics shimmering lucratively on the horizon, Hackney's streets began to seem paved with gold.

Broadway Market, oozes the Labour-run council, is now 'home to one of London's newest farmers markets, and an increasing range of specialist independent fashion boutiques, galleries, delis and bistros... a truly dynamic urban environment.' Yet, limping wretchedly amid financial and administrative chaos, the council has gone about stripping its assets like a former Eastern Bloc country circa 1991. In this part of London, rats don't abandon a sinking ship – they stay on board to hand out the rich spoils to their mates. And not sharks, but wolves have gathered.

Community Spirit

Up the road from Francesca's at number 71, a Rastafarian named Spirit has built up his Nutritious Food Gallery since 1993, selling fresh

fish and veg. Like Tony, he tried to buy the property in December 2001, presenting the council's estate agents with a deposit cheque for £10,000. Mysteriously, it was later sent back to him, unused. He turned up at the auction the same day. In a spectacular coup for Hackney's Equal Opportunities policy, the only black Rastafarian to have attended the sale was summarily barred, due to 'concerns' that he may not have been able to pay.

For the time being, Spirit is still trading, but now his place is owned by Broadway Investments (Hackney) Ltd., run from a PO box in Nassau in the Bahamas. Since 1997, while it's often proved impossible for locals to buy out their own places, the council has been keen to spread a little bit of Hackney all over the world – selling properties across the borough to companies in Moscow, South Africa and Dubai. But many, apparently unrelated, individual companies to have walked off with ex-council stock have turned out, curiously, to be traceable back to Nassau.

But for all the council's claims to have been seeking 'best consideration' – that's the highest price, to the you and I – in respect of the properties they've sold, 'Broadway Investments' underbid Spirit by £15,000. You don't need to go by Spirit's shop to catch the whiff of something fishy. The entire debacle of the Hackney's sell-offs is currently being investigated by Scotland Yard's Public Sector Fraud Office.

Back at Francesca's last December 21st, Wratten's men turned up brandishing a court order, and managed to evict the newly-occupied café. They demolished the roof, stairs and rear wall, before the Health and Safety Executive turned up and stopped them. On Boxing day, however, the locals re-squatted the place and, with the help of some friendly nearby builders, managed to re-build the roof and walls.

'Occupation by the local community' reads the banner above the door of Francesca's. 'Against Corrupt developers. We want our café not yuppie flats!' The pressure is on the council to find a way of re-possessing Spirit and Tony's properties on their behalf, come clean about the corrupt sell-offs, and end its relentless drive toward a brave new bourgeois world of creative 'agencies', and skatewear boutiques, in which beer is only to be sipped in some infernal, minimalist den of glass and marble.

As SchNEWS went to press, the occupiers of the café at number 34 were expecting an eviction any day. Should bailiffs move in on Spirit's shop, they've promised to occupy that too. "The support of community has been brilliant," enthuses Tony; "they've been all Sicilians here, except without the shotguns."

FOR MORE INFO

* <http://34broadwaymarket.omweb.org/modules/wakka/HomePage>

* <http://hackneygetsrippedoff.blogspot.com>

PUBLIC MEETING
Monday 16th January 7.30-9.30pm.
St Michael's Church Hall, cnr of Lansdowne Drive & Lavender Grove, Hackney E8.
Come and have your say before Deputy Mayor of Hackney, Jessica Crowe

'NUFF RESPECT

Big up the respec' agenda - ASBO massive in da house. The Respect agenda - what's it all about? Could it be an attempt to head off the Tories in the headlong rush to the right, or nick the name of Gorgeous George Galloway's personality cult while he's preoccupied in the hot tub with Dennis Rodman. In fact it's a cobbled together manifesto of rehashed ideas which exposes the neo-Labour project as the kneejerk crackdown conservatism it actually is.

Some parts of society are suffering from increasing friction and a breakdown in any sense of community. So what's to blame for the collapse in society's good manners? 'Flexible' working conditions? Low pay? The highest house prices in history? Alienation and the tedium of life on the treadmill in 21st Century Britain? Perhaps the fact that a price tag has been put on every aspect of public life? No, how stupid of us - it's just a mysterious upsurge in 'anti-social behaviour' caused by bad parents and lack of proper respect for authority.

Watching this lying warmonger pushing 'respect' is like having an arsonist trying to sell you a fire extinguisher when your house is in flames. Something's wrong but you can't quite put your fist on it.

Despite a bombardment of propaganda about hooded tops and binge drinking 'Neighbours from Hell' etc etc - it seems that only 17% of people on the street are 'worried' about anti-social behaviour. This has been taken by Tony's crew as a mandate for - you guessed it - extra police and state powers i.e. more CCTV, ASBOs, ABCs and all the usual death by acronym. ASBOs for kiddies under ten, on the spot fines for graffiti artists and a clamp down on mobile phones in school are all on the agenda. 'Course it doesn't matter if any of this actually addresses any real problems as long it gets the front page of the Daily 'Hate' Mail.

And no prizes for guessing which income bracket this effort is targeted at. In fact it looks like Neo-Labour have stuck by their promise to be tough on the causes of crime - only they reckon the cause of crime is not poverty but the poor. And in charge of the project is yet another "Tsar". Is there a reason why New Labour loves styling its supremos after the autocratic rulers of Imperial Russia? Perhaps we should be told. Maybe if these Tsars left the Winter Palace of Westminster and looked at life on an estate they might learn the real meaning of respect.

Effortlessly sailing past the causes of social breakdown to the symptoms, the raft (a rudderless vessel heading inexorably downstream) of new summary powers will extend compulsory parenting programmes. Despite opposition by 98% of Housing Associations, the proposals include cuts to housing benefit and eviction for people not toeing the line. In ASBoland homelessness is a cure for social breakdown. Problem families will be shoved into a national network of parenting academies or 'sinbins', which might bear superficial but irrelevant resemblances to prison camps.

Image conscious Neo Labour has even produced a logo for the campaign, featuring two arrows circling each other. It's themed on recycling: what goes around comes around. If you give respect you get it back. Perhaps if the politicians showed more respect for our poorer communities, people would offer respect back.

RESPECT YERSELF!

Meanwhile here's some communities earning real respect for staying intact despite the corporate onslaught:

* Following a three month struggle, locals in Haringey have succeeded in saving their local boozer from the clutch of rampant property developers. The **Fountain Pub** in West Green Rd, N15 was a well-used local community facility which ended up facing demolition to make



way for yet more luxury flats. The struggle and resistance by a united community resulted in Haringey council being forced to agree that the pub was a valuable community facility. Residents successfully argued that closing the place would contravene the Council's own policy on 'Protecting Existing Community Facilities'. Locals began mobilising their community, getting hundreds to sign petitions, organised public meetings, ran leaflet drops and raised the campaign's profile through the local media.

To contact the **Haringey Solidarity Group:** www.haringey.org.uk

* Over in Oxford the **Jericho Boatyard Campaign** has also had a busy year resisting the potential loss of community space to (oh yes!), yet more luxury homes. The huge need for sustainable and affordable living space in Oxford will certainly not be provided by this Bellway Corporate development or Blair's ASBOs. British Waterways, the body that is supposed to maintain the UK's canals, is planning to sell this and other land off. The campaign has seen some success with the council's refusal to grant planning permission, but the squatters at the Castlemill Boatyard had their court hearing last month, and now face eviction at the end of February with a demand for £2,500 in costs to boot. For more on the Castlemill Boatyard check www.portmeadow.org

SchNEWS in brief

Newcastle Green Fest crew are asking for anyone with mobile renewable power or biodiesel generators to contact them, as they're trying to go 100% renewably-powered at this year's Greenfestival on May bank holiday www.newcastlegreenfestival.org.uk ** Do you know **Helen Veda (Kazai)** last known to be with a travellers group at Brigg in 1994. Please contact Arani and Co Solicitors on 0208 893 5000 and ask for Nick, asap. ** Ten years since work started on the **Newbury Bypass** and guess what? New research shows that the bypass has fuelled traffic growth of just under 50%, congestion is as bad in town at rush hour as it was prior to the bypass opening, and that the new road has encouraged more traffic. Well worth £100 million plus. www.roadblock.org.uk ** From the people that bought you the G8 Bikeride 2005 ("pedaling from London to Scotland") comes the **Bicycology Roadshow 2006**. The idea is a roadshow involving workshops, climate change awareness, bike maintenance, bike-art, sustainable living, cinema, cafe and street performance, cycling around the country, linking up with local projects and campaigns to spread the word about all things bike-related. If you're interested in getting involved email info@bicycology.co.uk ** **15 young anti-dam activists** staged a noisy sit-down demo in **Iceland's** Ministry of Industry last Monday. This action is part of an on-going campaign against Capital's latest earth-rape in the shape of a number of new hydro-dam projects in the country. Two of the activists were given suspended sentences and ordered to pay £6000 in fines and expenses. A huge benefit gig with Bjork was held in Reykjavik to raise money and interest in this new upsurge of eco-resistance. www.savingiceland.org ** **Smash EDO** are having another noise demo on the 18th outside the fac-

tory on Homefarm road, Moulscoombe, from 4 till 6. Bring drums and stuff that makes noise.** Fancy spring in the beautiful West of Ireland? A second **environmental direct action camp** is planned for March, blocking **Shell's** plans to place pipelines from the sea. The camp had total success last year, stopping all work and intend a repeat performance. The campaign has massive support in Ireland and is part of a growing resistance to environmental degradation. Bring an umbrella ** 21st January - national demo in London calling for Justice for British Residents of **Guantanamo Bay**. For details see www.cage-prisoners.com

POSITIVE SchNEWS VEG-UCATION?

Forget pukka ponce Jamie Oliver, the **Veggies Catering Campaign** are to take on a catering contract, to provide animal friendly wholesome meals for a Nottingham primary school. Run in combination with classroom sessions on nutritious cooking, Veggies is even offering school dinners for the general public! To find out more check out www.veggies.org.uk

WALKING ON AIR

The **Zapatista's** are back on the airwaves again on this, their 12th anniversary (See SchNEWS 250). Hidden away in the Mexican forests, **Radio Insurgente** broadcasts weekly programmes on resistance to global capitalism mixed in with contemporary ranchero for light relief. Taste online at www.radioinsurgente.org (but it's mostly in Spanish!) ** Meanwhile, a little closer to home, the insurgent and independant **Radio4A** is now 24/7. Hidden away in the concrete jungles of Brighton, these peeps have been broadcasting seditious for over ten years now and are on the airwaves at 101.4 FM and online at www.radio4a.org.uk

ZION BRAIN

Activists with the **International Solidarity Movement** were detained and deported from Israel after attempting to reach a conference on non-violence in Bethlehem over Christmas. In an interesting twist the judge deported them partially on the basis "there are reports of anarchist activity abroad" i.e. political involvement in their home countries. Given one of those detained is continually spied upon by the Met's Forward Intelligence Team despite having no convictions, it begs the question of how much collusion there is between UK and Israeli intelligence concerning pro-Palestinian and Peace activists. See www.palsolidarity.org.uk

...and finally...

Sick of celebrity Big Brother? Well Hackney council have got something to keep you glued to the goggle box as you shovel in yer Turkey Twizzlers. Watching us watching them watching you... lucky residents in east London will soon be able to spy on their neighbours via CCTV. In the 'soviet' themed scheme, curtain-twitchers too lazy to go their windows can turn amateur secret police by viewing footage from 11 local cameras. Police in turn will be able to broadcast details of any local suspected ASBO breakers. If 'successful' the brilliantly named 'Community Safety Channel' will be extended and offered to 20,000 residents covering 400 spy-cams.

SchNEWS look forward to the day when they install CCTV in Big Business Boardrooms so we can see how corrupt the buggers are, engaging in all that extreme anti-social behaviour - but we won't be holding our collective breath.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers... if you can't hack your community getting sold off to big business - do something 'abart it innit! Honest!

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, P.O. Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 0EF. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk