

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER LAST STRAW-BERRY...

# Weekly SchNEWS

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## A TWIST OF FETE

### STRAWBERRY FAIR CANCELLED AFTER POLICE INTERVENTION.....

*"It's rapidly becoming obvious that this is a nationwide issue - somehow the police have got it into their heads that music and dancing are bad for society. They've used the licensing laws as a weapon."* - Strawberry Fair organiser

In what is fast becoming a summer tradition, yet another gathering has fallen victim to party-pooing police tactics. The UK's last free open-air festival has been cancelled under police pressure. Strawberry Fair, in Cambridge, viewed by many as the starting gun for the festival season, has been stopped in its tracks after 37 straight years. Some (on Facebook at least) are vowing that some kind of festival will go ahead anyway.

The fair had actually been granted a full licence on March 2nd by Cambridge city council, despite police objections. However the cops used their discretionary powers to appeal the decision to the magistrates court. A final decision on the outcome wouldn't have been made until just a few weeks before the event. According to Justin Argent, chairman of the organising committee "The timetable for the appeal means we will not know whether the fair can go ahead as planned until far too late in the day. We do not want to pass this risk on to the supportive suppliers, traders and artists whose livelihoods would be severely damaged by a last-minute cancellation." Regular SchNEWS readers will remember the problems that followed the last minute cancellation of last year's Big Green Gathering (see SchNEWS 685).

The council weighed in with a spirited denunciation of the police. Jennifer Liddle, chairman of the city council's licensing committee, said, "It is a great shame an unelected and unaccountable police force decided to ignore that decision and lodge an appeal. Not only is their decision to try to ban Strawberry Fair undemocratic, it has cost an enormous amount of money". Even local MP David Howarth chipped in, "It should be left to democratically elected councillors to make decisions like these that affect our city, not unelected police officers."

In previous years the festival was conducted under the council's general entertainments licence for Midsummer Common. This year however the committee had to apply for a separate licence, which opened up the process to police intervention. Cambridge police assem-

bled a legal team, including London based barrister Elliot Gold and Avon and Somerset Police's Inspector Ian Ross, who fronted the Big Green Clampdown. They presented a 75 page dodgy dossier, which claimed that "music and dancing led to drug taking" (in our rhythmically challenged experience it's actually the other way round), and so consequently the event encouraged anti-social behaviour.

Also submitted was an unwittingly hilarious DVD, that mainly consists of soft focus shots of circles of cross-legged people who may or may not be skinning up. The highlight reel also includes a few voyeuristic shots of public urination and some lardy bouncers beating someone up. The DVD was published on Cambridge Police's website, but hastily taken down after a public outcry.

### FAIR PLAY?

Strawberry Fair is an entirely volunteer run non-profit event. Justin Argent, Chair of Strawberry Fair said, "As a voluntary group we don't have access to the kinds of legal resource or the public finance used by Cambridgeshire Police in their objections to the license. It is going to be an very tough task for us to prepare for the appeal hearing both in time and money". She added, "Gaining a secure license that will allow the Fair to continue for many years to come has to be the top priority for the Strawberry Fair committee. The police appeal of the decision made by Cambridge City Council means that we now have to put all our efforts into fighting that appeal, rather than into the detailed preparations for the 2010 Fair which should now be taking place, and we are not prepared to compromise either the appeal or the Fair itself"

Weirdly, at the end of last year's fair the police told the local paper that they were 'not aware of any major incidents at the event'. Now the party line is "Over the years, the event has attracted a large number of people - many from outside Cambridge - who see it as nothing more than an excuse to drink to excess and engage in illegal drug use, whilst at the same time becoming involved in anti-social behaviour disturbing to other fairgoers and city residents."

So why the sudden change of tune? According to one organiser, "They didn't have serious issues until we decided we weren't going



to pay them - this year they just wanted a nominal fee of £1,500. But that was set to change and rise to potentially thousands of pounds a year. Our attitude was that as the festival was free for all the people of Cambridge, there shouldn't be any charge by the police. As soon as we refused to pay this process of licence, objections started. We've no idea what their ultimate agenda is but it's clear they don't want the fair to continue in its present form".

Organisers also foresaw problems with policing at this year's fair if the police ban had been refused. "Even if the police lost their appeal there is no reason to suppose that would be the end of their campaign and a fair this year would have a pretty much unbearable and unmanageable police presence, and the real possibility of court cases for the license holder. We are but one of a number of events that are bearing the brunt of an overzealous police force, and last summer proved that even established, gated events (Big Green, Thimbleberry), with almost non-existent crime rates are not immune from this."

Festival organisers have stressed that they feel that an unauthorised gathering might be unhelpful to the continuance of the fair in future years. However one told us "We don't want to encourage it, but its clear that people do value the event possibly more than they value the organising team behind it. Strawberry is really important to people in Cambridge"

Organisers are calling out for donations to help fund the fight against the appeal so Strawberry Fair has the chance to officially go ahead next year. Meanwhile - check out the unofficial group on Facebook: They've cancelled Strawberry fair - I'll still turn up

\* See [www.strawberry-fair.org.uk/](http://www.strawberry-fair.org.uk/)

### THIMBLE PLEASURES

Andrew Norman, the organiser of Thimbleberry Festival who was charged with allowing his premises to be used for smoking cannabis (see SchNEWS 707), has had his case hurled out of court after the judge dismissed it as "invalidly committed".

After talks between the judge, the CPS and Andy's lawyer, the prosecution offered no evidence - presumably because they had none. The judge had questioned the prosecution's definition of premises, to which prosecutor Mark Giuliani replied, "it would appear to have been a field". The judge went on to say, "had this been looked at logically, it could never have been committed from the magistrates' court"

Although the first of this year's Thimbleberrys was cancelled, following his victory Andy declared, "the show is back on" and plans to go ahead with September's festival.

**INFORMATION FOR ACTION**

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## MET WITH UNDUE FORCE

It's been a sticky week for SchNEWS' favourite state thugs. The Met face a possible £250,000 compensation bill after admitting a raid on a squat the day after the G20 protests was illegal. The two demonstrators who took the Met to court are to receive £3,000 each which leaves 68 other protesters able to claim.

Cops burst into the squat armed with tasers, riot gear and a FIT team and proceeded to violently arrest the occupants (who had promptly sat down and offered no resistance) repeatedly cracking one activist on the head while he was on the floor. Despite cop claims that some 'violent' protesters from the day before were in the squat, none of the squatters matched any of the photos.

This followed a ruling in February in favour of climate camp, which declared the stop 'n' search tactics at Kingsnorth unlawful (see SchNEWS 708), anyone who's ever been a bit pissed off with the way the cops have treated them – now's your chance!

If you were one of the squatters – find out how to file your claim by emailing [legal@climatecamp.org.uk](mailto:legal@climatecamp.org.uk)

Also under the spotlight this week has been Met officer Delroy Smellie for his attack on protester Nicola Fisher at the memorial event for Ian Tomlinson, killed by police the day before. Despite footage showing Smellie striking Nicola with the back of the hand and then twice with a baton he denies assault. This 'flick of the hand' was apparently prompted by Smellie's trouser wetting at the rampaging hordes around him, and the weapon Fisher was holding (which turned out to be a carton of orange) a terror kept well hidden from all the cameras around. The trial continues at Westminster Mags next week.

Another embarrassment for the Met came when footage was released of them beating a protester with batons and shields at the Gaza demo last year before arresting and charging him with violent disorder. After withholding seven and a half hours of video evidence until the day before the trial the cops dropped the case. Had he be found guilty Jake Smith would have been facing up to three years inside.

## NEW DEAL OR NO DEAL

Last Wednesday, members of Brighton Benefits Campaign (BBC) staged a protest outside the offices of corporate welfare spongers, Careers Development Group and Maximus. The two companies are providers of Brightons 'Flexible New Deal' (FND), the government's new flagship scheme for anybody who's been unemployed for a year. The FND sees services normally provided by JobcentrePlus contracted out to private companies, whose prime motive for involvement is, of course, profit. While the government claims it is spending billions on helping the unemployed, it is just doing out the cash to the private sector, not to help those without jobs.

While the FND providers don't create any new jobs and the government has spent nothing on job creation, they do manage to expand the low wage, flexible labour market by forcing the unemployed, single parents, the sick and disabled and everyone else to compete for the scarce jobs on offer. As a result, wages plummet and working conditions deteriorate.

The FND also contains a work for your benefits (workfare) element - 40hrs a week for a month – at the fraction above slave labour rate of £1.60 an hour. The BBC are looking to expand their campaign against these parasitic profiteers. Anyone who wants to get involved should contact them at [www.brightonbenefitscampaign@gmail.com](http://www.brightonbenefitscampaign@gmail.com) or see [www.brightonbenefitscampaign.wordpress.com](http://www.brightonbenefitscampaign.wordpress.com)

## BE IN THE SchMOVIES

SchMOVIES invites you to its first Video Activist Training Course - learn how to shoot, edit and screen direct action and campaign films as well as advice on controlled interviews for campaign films, finding archive footage and your legal rights and dealing with the police! The course is free but donations are welcome. April 24th-25th, 11am-4pm, Cowley Club, Brighton. Limited places - email or phone to book now.

## GIMME FIFE

Twenty five activists occupied the site of the Blair House Open Cast Coal Site last Sunday (21st). The campaigners have put up nets, platforms and tree houses and barricaded the access road with the aid of a scaffolding tripod. Contractors have persevered with the felling of the birch and oak forest mere metres from the camp. The occupation is the second of its kind in recent weeks (see SchNEWS 714). The new coal mine is one of twenty to have recently been granted permission to mutilate Scotland.

On Thursday morning, the Dunfermline Sheriff Court responded by swiftly handing the camp its eviction summons, with notice to appear in court the following Monday.

Fife Council has given permission to UK Coal to mine 720,000 tonnes of coal from the site - a decision that more than 150 local residents oppose. This process was supposed to pass unnoticed by the majority of the local populace. Notifications were only sent out to people living within a 90m radius of the site - as if they will be the only ones affected.

The activists, supported by the local populace, are opposing the destruction of the natural landscape the mining will cause as it goes ahead, not to mention the noise, pollution, the detrimental effect on health, increased traffic, the destruction of native wildlife and of course the effects on climate change that creep closer each passing day.

\* Get involved - site no 07806926040 or see [www.coalactionscotland.noflag.org.uk](http://www.coalactionscotland.noflag.org.uk)

## EDL: BOLTON BLUNDERERS

Thousands of EDL supporters and anti-racists clashed in Bolton city centre last Saturday (20th) in a confrontation that led to 67 arrests.

Both groups assembled in Victoria Square where they were separated by hundreds of riot police, dogs and crowd control barriers. As protesters arrived in the square an electronic sign directed the EDL to one side of the square and the UAF to the other and police attempted to pen the opposing groups in with harris fencing. Free roaming anti-racists, including a large number of local Asian youth, confronted the smaller blocs of EDL that remained mobile.

Over fifty of those arrested were reported to be UAF supporters. Among them was UAF organiser Weman Bennet, who was seized by a police snatch squad. He has been charged with suspicion of conspiracy to commit criminal damage.

In the evening after the protest, a man was stabbed by a man wearing an EDL T-shirt. Witnesses reported seeing EDL supporters behaving aggressively and abusing customers in the Oddfellows Arms. When the man asked them to leave and escorted them outside, he was jumped on by EDL thugs. After his friend intervened, he was slashed on the shoulder with a cut throat razor.

\* See [www.manchesteruaf.org](http://www.manchesteruaf.org)

## PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see [www.schnews.org.uk/pap](http://www.schnews.org.uk/pap)

## EE BY HECKLER

Last week six anti-militarist activists were in court in Nottingham facing charges of Aggravated Trespass over a blockade of the arms corporation Heckler & Koch's Nottingham depot (See SchNEWS 710). The action involved a rooftop occupation and lock-on to the gates, closing the depot for the day.

Five of the Shut H&K (see SchNEWS 631) activists pleaded guilty and were fined – two who had prior convictions also got 12-month restraining orders preventing them from going near H&Ks premises. The sixth, who pleaded not guilty, will now go on trial on May 20th at Nottingham Magistrates Court (at 9.45am).

\* See <http://nottsamilitarism.wordpress.com> [www.shutdownhk.org.uk](http://www.shutdownhk.org.uk)

## SPEAK-ING OUT

Long term animal rights campaigner Mel Broughton has had his conviction for 'conspiracy to commit arson' quashed. However, he remains in prison and now faces a re-trial. This will make it the third time that Mel has stood trial for the same offences, which are alleged to be connected to the SPEAK campaign against Oxford University's animal laboratory.

It has become clear that Thames Valley Police are pursuing a political vendetta against Mel after they were caught on tape saying they would be "waging a dirty war" him "persecute him". (see SchNEWS 590)

## TITNORE: JACK OUT THE BOX

After getting nicked for obstruction, long-term Titnore resident Mr Jack Rumbold was bailed away from site. The bail conditions in effect banned him from the site that had been his only home since January.

On Wednesday (17th) he informed the powers that be that he planned to break his bail conditions as he objected to being made homeless. After he was duly locked up, he threatened to go on hunger strike to show his disgust. His solicitor pointed out to the court the disproportionate nature of his bail compared to the alleged crime. After some deliberation the judge decided to offer Jack a conditional discharge, leaving him free to go back to his treehouse.

\* See also [www.protectourwoodland.co.uk](http://www.protectourwoodland.co.uk)

## ...and finally...

The fear mantra of "If you suspect it – report it." is obviously seeping its way deeper into the mass subconscious by the day. Not surprising when it's broadcast on all railway station P.A.'s in between every train arrival.

Two South West trains security goons were clearly on a high state of alert when Tom 'well you can never be totally' Shaw, an unassuming young musician from the Southampton area plonked down on a seat by them and proceeded to write out a list of cover versions his band could play at an upcoming gig.

It only took one of fluoro-jacketed henchmen to glance over his shoulder and see Tom had jotted 'Cigarettes and Alcohol', 'Shut Up And Let Me Go', and 'Killers' before they sprung into heroic public defence action, forcing Tom get off the train at the next stop before grilling him in depth about the weird coded threats.

Just as well he hadn't been planning on playing 'Stairway to Heaven', 'I Wanna Live Forever' or 'Suicide is painless'... (insert your own song titles here – answers on a anthrax contaminated postcard to the usual address...)

## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, imagine a life without festivals, a fete worse than death. Honest.

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