

THE STAINES HOWLER

FREE

SPRING 2012

Workfare Protests Enjoy Popular Support in Egham

Early March saw protest action across the country against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) workfare schemes, as people became aware of the full scale of the Coalition government's forced labour programmes, and the Staines area was no exception. On Saturday 3rd March, Egham High Street saw a small, but successful demonstration staged outside Holland & Barretts, one of the companies still using unpaid workers to boost profits. Despite the unusually large and intrusive police presence in Egham on the day, protesters came away in high-spirits: "We spoke to lots of local people today, most of whom were really supportive. People are really angry about this issue, and they are right to be!"

Earlier in the day, leaflets were distributed inside Egham Tesco's, another company who had been exploiting workfare labourers until two days before. Protesters then staged a peaceful picket outside Holland & Barrett and opposite the British Heart Foundation shop, one of several charities taking on forced labour. Many local people took time out of their Saturday



afternoon to discuss the workfare schemes and give protesters their support. The ridiculously heavy police presence was also a source of much bafflement and amusement. Although billed as a "Work Experience" venture by the government and right-wing press, the reality of the workfare schemes is closer to that of the Victorian workhouses. All the workfare schemes are compulsory and the sanctions for refusal are forfeiture of benefits. The unemployed are given a non-choice: work 30 hours a week for a boss who

isn't prepared to pay you or lose the benefits you need to eat. This is an issue which affects all workers, not just those currently in unemployment. Every unpaid job represents a threat to those who rely on a wage to survive, as employers are encouraged to make use of free labour at the taxpayers' expense, and the principle of a 'fair day's pay for a fair day's work' is trampled into the dust. Quite opposed to the spin of "helping the unemployed back to work", workfare is actually setting the stage for selling the working classes into forced labour.

Fortunately, working class people are seeing the workfare schemes for what they are, and there has been an exodus of companies who do not want to be associated with what is essentially slave labour after the outcry of disgust from ordinary working people. If the pressure can be kept up over the coming months, then the entire workfare debacle looks ready to collapse.

The Olympics Comes To Royal Holloway

As many locals probably know by now, Royal Holloway University is set to be one of the locations where athletes competing in the London 2012 Olympics will live during their stay. The 'Olympic Village' for the kayakers and rowers (along with their trainers and officials) will be based there so the athletes can be near Dorney Lake, Eton, where their events are taking place. As we are finding out, the games are already proving to have many drawbacks for ordinary people.

First of all the government set aside over £9 billion of public money to be put into holding the games. This comes when the government tells us we are in times of austerity; when cuts are being made to education, to healthcare, to disability and housing benefits, to youth clubs.... and they think it's a good time to have a knees up! £41 million of public money is being spent on the opening ceremony alone.

What has emerged recently is the controversy of the Olympic lanes



The Olympic Lanes: A new sign that it's one rule for the rich and another for everyone else.

in London. We were told in the beginning that these lanes would be for athletes and officials to get to and from events and training. Recently, however, it has been revealed that these lanes are being made available to sponsors such as Coca Cola and McDonalds and essentially anyone... if they're rich enough to afford a pass.

Many Londoners, who will be trying to go about their daily

business at the time of the games, are rightly hacked off that they'll be stuck in traffic jams whilst sponsors and rich business types cruise past in their chauffeur-driven cars. One London cabbie, Jonathan Myers from the United Cabbies Group, remarked: "This is not the greatest show on earth. This is a jolly for elite people and we've all been mugged off here". Too right we have.

Olympic-sized lies are cropping up here, there and everywhere. The government told us the games would have a legacy of job creation and more housing but in reality the jobs created for the most part will only last the duration of the Olympics and up to 1000 people's homes in the Clays Lane Community area in London have been destroyed to make way for facilities.

The company selected by LOCOG (the Olympics organising committee) to deal with providing food for the athletes doesn't exactly have the cleanest record

The Olympics Comes To Royal Holloway continued...

either. That company is Aramark, a US-based company responsible for running canteens in prisons in the UK and in some detention centres. They hold a monopoly on the range of goods inmates are able to access and are thus able to charge sums far greater than what would be charged for products outside prisons. In their merciless pursuit of profit they have also often failed to pay wages to workers.

Public money has been thrown into something we didn't ask for when there are more important things that need to be addressed. The billions of pounds that are to be spent on the Olympics could be better spent on projects elsewhere in bettering facilities and the

quality of life in communities. But in the government's selfish drive to raise the country's profile and LOCOG's pursuit for profit, the everyday survival needs of the population are being bypassed.

The Olympics is not a sporting spectacle for the people. Its main focus is profit and it's further commercialising sport. Whilst the games don't have the support of most Londoners, through the media the government has created an illusion of support with multiple stunts and novelties.

However, this is not a case of 'oh shock horror, the government has put business and rich people's interests before those further

down the pyramid'. Rather the exact opposite is the point. It would actually be very surprising if the interests of those lower down the scale were put first. Is it any wonder that the interests of the wealthy, of those in business, are put first and foremost and the interests of ordinary people left to fall by the wayside when the economy is protected by governments no matter the cost? It's the wealthy who fund their political parties, who run their outlets for propaganda and can put in a good word for them when they need it (the media). This being the case, did we really think the interests of ordinary people would be the government's main concern for the Olympics?

When School's Out

While walking past my old secondary school (Matthew Arnold) a few days ago I noticed two police officers standing outside, I thought to myself "What's happened?" maybe a car was speeding or somebody had stolen something from the school.

Over the next few weeks I realised that nothing had actually happened, the cops were just hanging around while students left at 3:00pm, despite the bad reputation that Matthew Arnold had when I went, there is never any need to have police keeping watch over children as they leave school as if they were criminals. I was angrier when I saw that even



my old primary school (Laleham C of E) had a 'police community support officer' stationed outside when children left. Why? Has there been a sudden spate of kidnappings outside of these schools? Are they being protected

from a hidden menace? No, just being watched by our friendly neighbourhood coppers. With Tasers and handcuffs just in case.

Both of these schools are on busy roads and of course children's safety is always a key priority when students have to cross the road to get home or to get to their parent/carers' car but that's what lollipop people do. Why not have parents, teachers and older siblings making sure students are safe as they leave school? Better community involvement is the answer when it comes to protecting children and teenagers not police intimidation.

Produced by:

STAINES  ANARCHISTS

"Anarchists?! Aren't you those people who love chaos and disorder?"

The short answer is, no. Contrary to popular belief we believe in a highly organised society in which workplaces and communities are self-managed by the people.

At the moment a small group of politicians and business owners make the crucial decisions on issues that affect our lives. The choices made are in the interests of profit and the social elite, not ordinary people. Instead we would like to see people making the choices that affect their community and workplaces, and taking control of their own lives.

Anarchism is a way of thinking about how society should be organised and challenging a system where ordinary people are being screwed over.

stainesanarchists@riseup.net
www.stainesanarchists.wordpress.com