

An injury to one is an injury to all

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Direct Action

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Newsletter of the Solidarity Federation - Brighton Local

Hospitality Workers Come Together

In an industry renowned for low pay, insecurity and competitiveness, a group of workers are getting together to fight for respect and better wages.

They all work in cafes, restaurants, canteens and hotels in Brighton and Hove and have decided enough is enough.

They are sick of being expected to work trial shifts for no wages, having administration charges deducted from their tips, working ten hour shifts with no breaks and being bullied by management.

It is routine for workers to turn up for a shift only to be sent away unpaid because the restaurant is quiet, some have not been paid wages owed by their boss and have been forced into periods of homelessness.

Add to this the increasing threat of raids by the UK Border Agency and the general precarious nature of the work and people are really pissed off. This is why Solidarity Federation have formed Brighton Hospitality Workers (BHW) to campaign for better conditions.

When questioned about these grievances industry spokesperson Warwick Hunt said, 'Of course we'd like to treat these people like human



Jamie Oliver hears about BHW

beings but we can't if we are to keep up our profits. My skiing trip won't pay for itself. Anyway, what do they expect? Our money pays their wages so what we say goes'.

In response, a BHW spokesperson said. 'See how much profit they can make without us. Their customers can't eat money'.

Bosses are clearly worried about this new development. In a city where posters advertising club nights and student deals remain up for weeks, BHW's posters are regularly taken down or defaced. We can only assume this is done by exploiters running scared. The good news is that these posters have been seen by fed up workers who have got in touch.

Bosses are right to be concerned. BHW have notched up several victories against employers who have owed back pay and holiday entitlement. Three bosses have already agreed to cough up over £1000 between them to three former employees and members of BHW, two of whom were a multinational hotel chain and an transnational employment agency.

As part of the campaign to assert the rights and dignity of those who actually create the profits in this industry, BHW are compiling a list of dodgy businesses. If your employer treats staff badly call our Shop Your Boss hotline on 07561 185 204 and tell us what they are up to. Watch this space for the upcoming Rogues' Gallery.

And if you're an employer and want to give us feedback on how the campaign is affecting your business your comments are always valued. Call our 24-hour hotline on 0800-KISS-MY-ARSE.



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BHW in quick win against hotel chain



Life as a migrant worker



Starting a new job & employment contracts



trouble with the boss or landlord? get in touch

Casualisation vs anarcho-syndicalism: Hotel agency pay up after single picket

In February, two members of Brighton Hospitality Workers (BHW) brought unpaid holiday entitlement issues to the group, incurred while both had worked at the Brighton premises of a transnational hotel chain. The hotel's housekeeping staff were contracted to work there by the UK operation of an international recruitment agency with a reputation for withholding pay, particularly after contracts had been

terminated. One worker was owed £286 in holiday pay for leave she was prevented from taking, despite repeated requests to her manager, as well as 2 days' outstanding sick pay. The second worker was owed £180 in holiday pay, also for leave she was prevented from taking, again despite repeated requests – in December her boss told her she 'had lost' her right to take paid leave.

Interviews with the workers exposed shameful conditions at the hotel: 'Housekeeper's health conditions don't matter and work pressure is huge. You are expected to work really fast, maintaining a work rate of 3 or 4 rooms an hour, sometimes without taking breaks for lunch and feeling dizzy or dehydrated. You know when you start but never when you'll finish'. The workers held both the recruitment agency and the hotel management equally responsible: 'They offer cheap rooms but the only cheap thing in this hotel is the worker, who thanks to the agency, changes the bedding, cleans and tidies-up sometimes very messy and dirty rooms for less than £2 per room. Wouldn't you have thought the hotel was happy enough with its extremely high profits?' Recording workers' experiences is an important part of BHW strategy, and we are building a database of bad employers to be shared on social media and reproduced on a map of exploitation 'hotspots'.

As at the start of any workplace conflict, a strategy was agreed on with the workers and immediately put in place. Letters demanding payment



Know your rights at work:

Contracts and starting a new job

When you accept a job offer a legal contract is in place even if you haven't been given this in writing. You have the right to a written statement of the terms & conditions of your job no later than 8 weeks after starting. This contract must include:

- name of employer & employee
- date job began & for how long it will continue
- rate of pay, how often it will be paid & how this is calculated
- terms relating to the hours of work or a 'zero hours' contract
- holiday entitlement, including public holidays which your employer can include
- rules about sickness absence
- length of notice you must give to leave the job
- job title & brief description of duties
- if the job is 'fixed term': the date it's expected to end, or if it's a 'zero hours' contract
- place and address of work

- details of disciplinary procedure
- if you are regularly expected to work overtime

You must receive a payslip by your first pay date that shows wages before and after deductions. Your employer can only make deductions if these are required by law (income tax, national insurance) OR if a term in the contract allows them to AND they have your consent - in many casual or temporary jobs it's common practice for the employer to make deductions from your first payslip for training days, and to do this they must issue you with a contract including this or notify you beforehand. It is illegal for your wages not to be paid on time or not in full.

You're not required to work for more than 48 hours per week (on average over your first 17 weeks) although you can voluntarily sign an agreement to opt out of this.

You are entitled to a 20-minute break if you work for 6 hours, although you might not be paid for this.

You are entitled to 5.6 weeks (28 days) holiday leave per year if you work full-time or a proportion of this if you work part-time – for one year's entitlement this is calculated by multiplying the hours you work in a normal week by 5.6 (see calculator at www.gov.uk/calculate-your-holiday-entitlement). It's common for this to be calculated monthly but this doesn't mean you are required to take the leave each month as it can be carried over into the following month. Many employers – particularly in casual or temporary work – don't permit leave at busy times of the year and they must either include this in the contract or notify you beforehand.

Remember that many employers - hospitality, catering or retail being particular offenders – will withhold this information from you. It's important that you are aware of your basic rights and are able to assert them in your workplace. Talk to your colleagues, make them aware too, and have the confidence to demand your rights from the bosses. Contact Brighton Hospitality Workers if you need support to do this!

were sent to the agency, firstly from the individual workers, and when this failed to get a response, from BHW and Brighton SolFed as a collective demand. Our collective demand resulted in part payment to one of the workers, but clearly this wasn't enough. A propaganda leaflet about the campaign, naming both hotel and agency, was drafted and sent to both, warning that if full payment wasn't made immediately then a campaign of action would begin. We agreed to focus action on the hotel, being the workplace directly responsible and also the most vulnerable in terms of it's public profile – it would then be up to hotel bosses to put pressure on the agency to pay up.

We staged a well-attended picket of the hotel on a Saturday morning in March, where leaflets were handed to guests, staff and management, and plastered over the windscreens of guests' cars. The hotel manager was obviously surprised by this and during a discussion with two of our delegates hurriedly contacted her area manager and the agency director. We left promising escalating action until the workers' demand were met, including a social media campaign, which visibly alarmed the manager. We were contacted on Saturday afternoon by both the hotel chain's area manager and the agency director, who requested that further action be suspended until they investigated the matter. Full payment was made the following week, and in a statement the agency director stated that they were paying as 'a gesture of goodwill' – it's amazing how much goodwill a campaign of direct action can inspire!

Migrant worker experience

We have all arrived here with excitement, with the aim of working hard and improving our English in order to work in our "ideal job" someday... I have seen most of you, in the kitchens, washing plates or cleaning schools.

However, time passes and life asks for its place and its essence, and work with endless shifts becomes harder.

The thought "at least I have a job" starts to conflict with self-respect.

We realise that we are just cheap workforce with no rights, in

some cases for four or five pounds per hour, with no contract nor holidays.

Coming to make some money becomes just survive. Food becomes a treasure - and you eat as much as you can in the workplace- and the contact with your loved ones, just a message or a visit, becomes the best of the presents.

During this time I have seen and experienced a lot of abusive situations. Things like pay a "deposit" of 100 pounds in free work hours, earn £3.50 per hour or

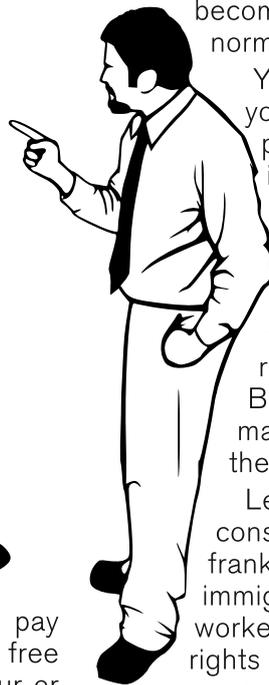
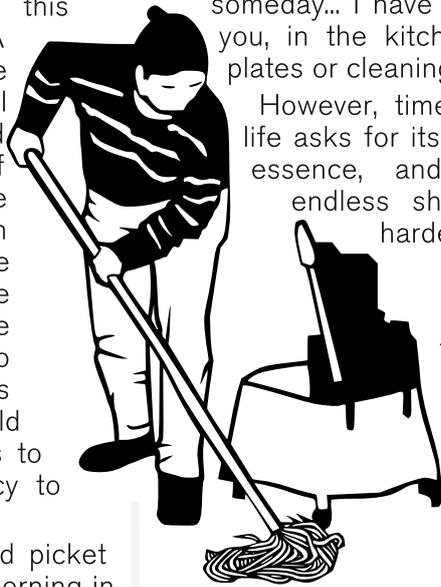
just not be paid or "free trainings" for inexistent jobs. Dreams about the "ideal job" ends washing plates and mops, further and further away from the wages of native workers, you accept the situation and aspire to £6.31 per hour.

Some go back, some withstand, some try to get benefits, but almost nobody speaks up to condemn the situation that is becoming worse. That situation is well known for us, we lived it in our country but from the other side. Not many people claim for their rights: yes, we are immigrants, but regardless where we come from we have rights, dignity, dreams and aspirations.

Capitalism is the global game, and now we have to play from this side. However, we fought for immigrants' rights in our country and we will not stay passive now, because the situation will become worse if we do nothing. There are more and more abuses, and it is becoming more and more normalised.

You were brave, and you decided to take a plane and try to improve your life many kilometres away... are you really willing to stay quiet? Are you willing to be ridden roughshod over? Because this attitude makes things worse for the rest of us.

Let's arm our conscience, let's speak frankly, where we said immigrants let's say workers, where we said rights let's say justice!! Hospitality in struggle!



Brighton Hospitality Workers

Who are the Brighton Hospitality Workers ?
BHW is a campaign against precarious working conditions in the local hospitality sector initiated by Brighton SolFed. Whether it's bullying, outstanding pay, or horrible working conditions, we offer practical support to hospitality workers wanting to stand up to their bosses and organise. As more hospitality workers get involved and take action, we would like it to ultimately develop into a local anarcho-syndicalist union. Casualised working conditions are a daily reality in Brighton's hospitality industry. In response we're raising our profile with stalls on Saturday afternoons and flyposting across the city.

From London to Newcastle: Winning back stolen wages

What can workers do when bosses get so greedy they don't just pay badly but steal our wages altogether? SolFed locals had some successes winning back wages over the last month.

In London, Marta, a receptionist at the Speak Up language school, has won a week's unpaid wages and a glowing reference after a short but intense campaign. Marta was sacked without reason and without the required one week's notice. She got in contact with North London SolFed who quickly organised over a dozen people to march into the bosses' office with a letter demanding she be given a week's pay in lieu of notice and a positive reference.

After Speak Up failed to respond to Marta's letter, SolFed and other supportive individuals and organisations organised a massive blockade of the Speak Up Facebook page. Hundreds of post

appeared within the 45 minutes. An hour and half into the action, Speak Up shut down their Facebook page entirely to all UK users.



The next day SolFed received an email from the bosses at Speak Up: they were paying up. It contained a copy of Marta's final payslip alongside a copy of a positive reference letter.

Meanwhile Newcastle SolFed have also won a substantial unpaid wages claim with a glazing and building company in Tyne and Wear. Acting with a worker who contacted us for support after unsuccessfully battling her former boss for wages due to her, and having agreed a demand and strategy, Newcastle SolFed initiated a public awareness campaign drawing attention to the behaviour and practices of the owner of the shop. The owner is notorious for his abuse of workers' rights: summarily sacking and not paying workers, as well as deducting money from wages for taxes that he never pays.

Despite empty threats, harassment and intimidation to both the former employee and to Newcastle Local, the company capitulated due to door-to-door leafleting of the neighbourhood,

four days before his shop was planned to be picketed.

Newcastle Local would have preferred the company to have promptly paid the money owed - a four figured sum - without having to resort to direct action, thus keeping the name of the company out of the public domain. However due to the owner's slippery attempts at delay his public shaming was unavoidable.

The intimidation and harassment only served to increase our determination with the result of a quick and easy win for the Local that gained them an extra member.

Whether we work in construction or teaching, we don't have to accept bullying bosses or bad conditions lying down - if we act in solidarity we can win. Whether, like Marta, you have no contract or just a lousy contract, don't be afraid to fight back. Talk to your workmates and think how you can collectively fight to improve your working conditions. And if you need help, don't hesitate to contact SolFed.



Getting messed around by a boss or landlord? Want to do something about it? Get in touch! Call us on 07790607310.

About us

Brighton SolFed (Solidarity Federation) is a local group based on the idea that through solidarity and direct action, ordinary people have the power to improve our lives.

Our members are workers, students and others looking to build a libertarian working class movement. Our aim is to promote solidarity in our workplaces and outside them, encouraging workers independently to of organise bosses, bureaucrats and political parties to fight for our own interests as a class. Our ultimate goal is a stateless, classless society based on the principle of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need' - libertarian communism.

We see such a society based on our needs being created out of working

class struggles to assert our needs in the here and now. Our activity is therefore aimed at promoting, assisting and developing such class struggles, which both benefit us all now and bring us closer to the society we want to create.

We believe in direct action solidarity. That could mean pickets or occupations, or organising with your co-workers. We also believe in collective action - that we are stronger when we stand together. Discuss your problem with us and we'll make suggestions how we can help - but the decision which course of action to take always rests with you.

We do this in our free time and we'll help you out for free... so why would we do this? We are not a service provider - we can't provide professional legal advice, and we can't solve your problems for you.

We are not a trade union or political party. What we are is fellow workers ourselves and want to do something about it. What we can do is share experience, information, and support in methods which have proven effective previously. This is solidarity, not charity. An injury to one is an injury to all!

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