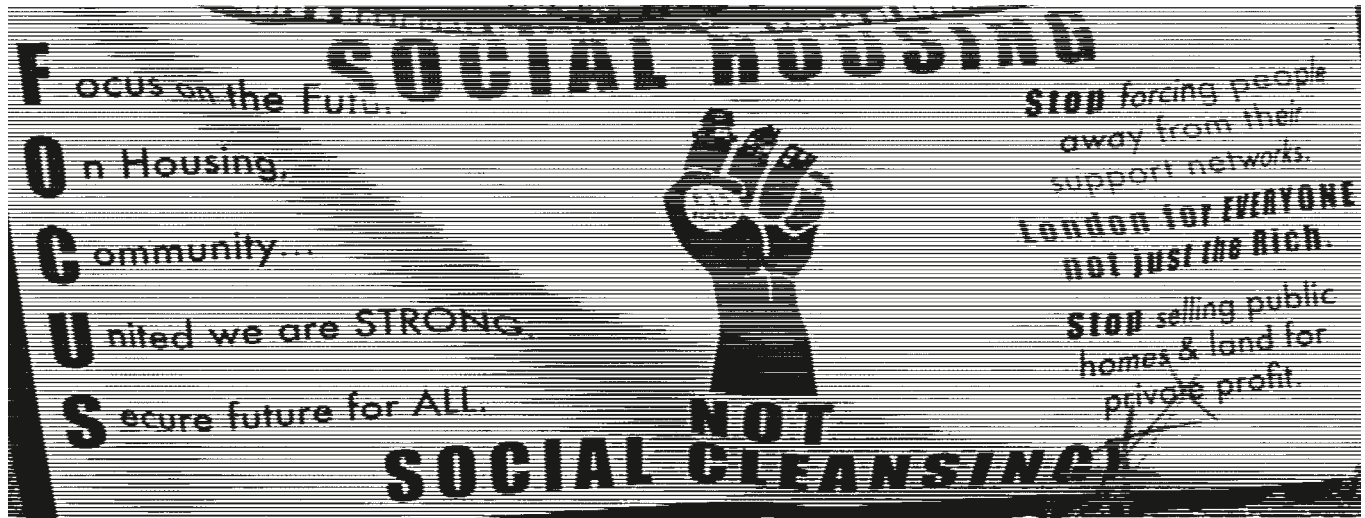


# Solidarity Collective

The Solidarity Collective was established in 2013 to promote respect, cooperation and solidarity within and between activist networks. We came together following the attack on a peace activist at the 2013 Anarchist Book Fair in London



## The Focus E15 Mums, Steve Hedley & Social Exclusion

The Focus E15 Mums have created and sustained an amazing campaign since Newham Council closed their hostel in 2013 and attempted to move them out of the borough to places such as Birmingham, Hastings and Manchester.

Since squatting flats on the boarded up Carpenter's Estate in September, they have managed to extract an apology from the mayor, along with an undertaking that he will house up to 40 families there. They have been an inspiration to the many insecurely housed and homeless who also face the threat of being moved far from their families and communities as part of a concerted drive by boroughs across London to force the marginalised out of the city.

Many have felt able to rally behind their **Social Housing, not Social Cleansing** banner at a time when very few successful campaigns have emerged against Tory austerity and the demonisation of the have nots.

They have enjoyed support from other campaigns and unions, but perhaps the biggest splash was caused when Russell Brand associated himself with the campaign. Despite a history of sexist behaviour, Brand was warmly welcomed by the women. Back in January, UK Uncut activist and writer Ellie Mae O'Hagan called Brand to account for his sexism, but also said:

*"I certainly don't think he should be summarily excommunicated from the left because he has been guilty of sexist behaviour, like his recent appearance on an MSNBC show."*

However, after RMT trade union Snr. Asst. Gen. Sec. Steve Hedley turned up to speak in response to an invitation from campaigners, a visit which by all accounts seems to have passed without incident, the campaign that had been so forgiving of Russell Brand issued a statement on October 6th in which they declared that they had asked Hedley not to return, and had further requested that *"the RMT send a female representative if they want to support our actions."*

The campaign explained its actions thus: *"Last year another member of the RMT sought the support of her union and the police after a very serious physical assault by Hedley, her partner at the time... We would like to send a message of solidarity to Caroline Leneghan, Hedley's former partner and we admire her bravery in speaking out against a man in a position of considerable power."*

Ellie Mae O'Hagan, along with hundreds of others, supported this particular **summary excommunication** with a Facebook 'like'.

This statement is at best misleading, as

it presents an incident that is disputed and unproven as fact. A more truthful representation of the situation might have read:

*"Last year, a member of the RMT sought the support of her union and the police, a year after an alleged physical assault by Hedley, who was her partner at the time of the incident but at which point she was not yet an RMT member. In the interim, she joined the union and campaigned on Hedley's behalf and, just days before going public with her allegations, had told Hedley that 'i was truly so happy with u and u made my life so happy', that she wished to remain friends and stated clearly: 'its not like weve done anything bad to each other.' The police investigation concluded that 'the matter was not capable of proof at Court' while the RMT found 'No case to answer'."*

Members of our collective, who have been concerned by a string of **summary excommunications from the left**, have recently examined the allegations made against Steve Hedley in detail. The case is by no means clear cut and it is hard to see how what has been presented as 'evidence' against Hedley could possibly justify his excommunication on the grounds given, an exclusion then extended to all male representatives of the RMT acting in an official capacity.

We can understand, given the difficulties that some of the women in the Focus E15 Campaign have faced, that they may well be wary of the presence of a man described to them as a violent abuser. But we are concerned that they then decided to issue such a public and unambiguous statement, joining a long line of people who have persecuted Steve Hedley, despite there being insufficient evidence for a prosecution, and despite him being cleared by the RMT after the claims were investigated. As one of our members commented: ***“Before this, E15 were everybody’s darlings and could do no wrong, now they have been brought into the murky world of identity politics.”***

We are unaware of any allegation that Steve Hedley has been violent towards anyone whilst supporting campaigns on behalf of the RMT, and therefore find it frightening that someone offering support should be attacked by those to whom he is offering support. We wonder if the request that the RMT should only send female representatives has been extended to all other unions, and whether the group will reinforce its status as a “women-led campaign” by giving Russell Brand the boot. If not, then it appears that the campaign is now also targeting the RMT for special and less favourable treatment.

Analysing the processes and problems of dealing with such allegations, one writer recently noted:

***“The oppressive social relations we struggle against are inevitably reflected in us, individually and collectively. We are scarred, and our relations with each other are scarred, though obviously we are not all scarred in the same way. To fight and organise, together, against the world as it is, we must fight to be together in ways which challenge and subvert, rather than perpetuate, the modes of domination, exploitation and violence which create us as subjects.”***

Many of those who desperately need social housing, are indeed amongst the most scarred. And it stands to reason that a fight “for social housing for all” is also a fight for those who face some of the greatest difficulties and hardships.

Members of the Solidarity Collective are against all forms of oppression. We are passionate believers in the ideal of justice for all, housing for all and that all needs should be met. We believe that those who have suffered abuse and oppression should be treated with care, compassion and offered support. But we do not believe that the way to fight abuse is by abusing others or excluding them on spurious grounds. We have seen too many instances of both recently.

As the previously cited article notes:

***“...people experiencing serious mental health problems are being thrown out of political and social spaces because their presence is claimed to be triggering to others. In some cases, people have suffered mental breakdowns as a direct result of campaigns against them in the name of safer spaces. There has been at least one suicide attempt, and this is hardly surprising, really, given that the punishment which ostracism is intended to inflict is social death. If a person makes every space they enter unsafe, where on Earth are they supposed to go? So to put it bluntly, no side can have a monopoly on trauma, or to use a less loaded term, on suffering.”***

We do not claim to know what happened between Caroline Leneghan and Steve Hedley in January 2012, but we have seen clear evidence that Caroline remained very attached to Steve up until the moment she accessed his Facebook account a year later and discovered that he was involved with another woman. Her immediate reaction was to make complaints to the police and his employer, and when both attempts failed to have the desired effect, she turned to the wider movement.

If the police have been unable to construct a case strong enough to take to the CPS, and the union executive has ratified the finding of the RMT investigation that Steve Hedley has ‘No case to answer’, then we simply do not understand how activists can justify hounding him on the internet, and hound those who invite him to speak. We are aware that Steve has children, and that they too have been affected by this vociferous campaign against their father.

One example of how this online vilification spreads and escalates can be seen in a shocking (and inaccurate) Facebook comment by Glasgow Anarchist Federation who, when sharing the Focus E15 Mothers’ statement, wrote:

***“Known wife-beater Steve Hedley from RMT turns up to Focus E15 Mothers campaign. Focus E15 Mothers promptly, clearly, and publicly tell him he’s not welcome and send a message of support to his ex. Focus E15 Mothers are THE FUCKING BEST EVER.”***

We note that the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL) seems to have played a large role in the campaign against Steve Hedley, and we question their motives for this. While AWL members have stated: ***“We are NOT claiming to know for sure whether Steve Hedley is guilty. We accept that in legal or disciplinary terms he should be regarded as innocent until proved guilty”***, they go on to say: ***“We do think it is unlikely that a woman would put herself through a difficult and painful investigation process without genuine cause”*** and appear, in this instance, to have based their public condemnation of Steve Hedley on such speculation. However, AWL attacks on Steve on other issues long pre-date this incident.

If AWL’s speculation is wrong and Caroline Leneghan’s cause was not genuine but rather based on revenge over rejection or other factors, then the Focus E15 Campaign has done Steve Hedley and his family a massive disservice by issuing that statement. Also, by publicly attacking one of their supporters, they have diverted attention away from their own primary cause and have embraced social exclusion, a problem they are supposed to be fighting against.

For a referenced version of this leaflet, go to the site: **[saferspaces.exposed](http://saferspaces.exposed)**

In a separate document, also available as above, we take a closer look at the events surrounding the allegations and investigations and provide links that people can use to inform themselves more fully about the way this matter has been handled by the Left.