



LUMPEN

A JOURNAL FOR POOR AND WORKING-CLASS WRITERS

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A journal for poor and working-class writers

Issue 013

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Each author asserts their moral right to be identified as the author of their respective work

Edited by Zosia Brom

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We printed this issue using an online print service because printing co-ops aren't affordable to us. All workers still got paid. But sadly, there was at least one boss involved in the process of publishing this journal.

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Editorial

Zosia Brom

It feels like it would be appropriate to call this issue The New Lumpen, for it's been a while since you last heard from us and now we are coming back with a new format, new graphic design, and a new website. These changes correspond to the exciting progress we, despite numerous challenges, have made as an organization over the past year or so: more evidence of this you will soon see in the big bad world near you.

What remains unchanged is that we are a magazine dedicated to platforming poor and working-class people, a place where those facing barriers and stigma in our society can express themselves without the filter of what this-or-that academic or a journo thinks the working class, or poverty, or both, is and means, what should be our interests, desires and identities.

With the updated version of Lumpen, we endeavor to contribute to the general socio-political discourse. We want to think big. We want to tune in to real people's political discussions and bring class focus to them. We want to provide a platform for you to develop ideas responding to contemporary world issues and help us progress towards a better societal model. We want to contribute to the emergence of class politics, both in theory and praxis, that will provide ideas and solutions matching the actual reality of the 21st century rather than endlessly focusing on grand books of the past. We want to tackle class reductionism and the gatekeepers who obstruct the progress in the much-needed update of class analysis. We want to challenge the dismissal of class politics and the role class poses in our society. We want to know how real people see class politics refreshed and matching real-world challenges, how class intersects with other forms of oppression in our society, how different

political proposals, actions and ideas interact with the class discourse. We want to know how you see the class analysis and theory changing to better reflect the complexities of contemporary society. We, too, want to share personal experiences, good and bad, laugh and cry together. We want those who often are spoken for to speak for themselves.

In this first issue of a new chapter in our history, you will find contributions coming from many different perspectives and styles of writing. By selecting them the way we did, we wanted to avoid the fallacy of seeing class politics and discourse as, so to speak, an extreme version of so-called identity politics, the perspective that essentially relies on presenting “the working class” through the lenses of a stereotype prevalent in the upper classes of the UK society. Avoiding this stereotype means discussing class in the intersectional, multilayered context. It also means the understanding that

a working class writer can, should and is more than capable to have interests beyond their class background and as such is under no obligation to focus their writing on issues related to class only. As such, we wanted to avoid the mainstream expectations of what “a working class writer” ought to write about and be interested in, instead, we want to showcase such writing in its diverse glory.

Lastly, there is one change we are rather sad and definitely not excited to introduce: the price of Lumpen is raising. This is the one change we are not happy about at all and would rather avoid, however, realistically speaking, we are unable to cover the cost of continued price increases in the publishing industry, the increases that are the reflection of the perma-crisis we are living in. This change, we apologize for and we hope you will understand it is not in our control. We understand that our readers struggle too and that not everybody can afford such a price increase: to mitigate this issue, we will be releasing digital issues of Lumpen free of charge on our website.●

LUXURY EXHAUSTION

Elliott Rose

When I was 14, my mother and I fled our home to escape domestic abuse. This home was pokey, a terrace located in the hills between an abattoir and a weapons testing lab - if the wind flowed in the wrong direction, all you could smell was blood and gunpowder. Our neighbour was a friendly witch whose house emitted loud, grating noises like she was rolling a millstone around her living room. All our cats ran away when we moved there. It was home.

Only weeks after we fled, I came out to my mum as transgender. We were in temporary shelter: a tiny maisonnette in the middle of town with cracked windows and a haunted attic. I wrote her a letter on the school computers and left it on the kitchen counter. When I came home, she was smoking out of the window and holding back tears. "Don't you think I have enough to deal with?" I didn't bring it up again for months, until it was safe to go back home and we could smell the gunpowder once more.

I understand why my mum did this. She was forced with her two young children into precarity, with the threat of custody battles and homelessness hanging over her head. Being poor and in a housing crisis had to take precedence. And as an adult, I sympathise even more.

I sent a pitch for this article a few weeks before the deadline, wanting to write about 'trans exhaustion'

- how poverty and transness intersect to force transgender identity into the background by necessity, using my experiences with the rental market as a grounding point. As I was writing, my landlord sent me a Section 21 eviction notice. I have six weeks to find a new place to live and say goodbye to the flat I just started to call home. The writing that I'd begun was shelved for days as I scrambled to find a new place to live. At the same time, the local mental health team was attempting to block my testosterone prescription under the assumption that it was causing emotional problems. Despite wanting to dedicate time to this writing, the first creative thing I had secured in a year, I was forced to confront the material threats of homelessness and loss of medical care. I had too much to deal with.

Something lacking from the conversation on trans identity is the compounding effects of poverty. The specific effect being precarious, poor and working class whilst also being trans - those who subsist on wage labour or benefits instead of being one of the rare few trans people given airtime. Being trans compounds all of these - the threat of



Image: Steve W

Something lacking from the conversation on trans identity is the compounding effects of poverty.

having my HRT taken was an existential threat to the life I had built for myself and there was no real way to fight it other than through pleading. If they did choose to take away my HRT, I couldn't afford a private prescription. I'd be medically detransitioned through my doctors and also through my class status.

These two issues are just the latest in a year-long realisation of the limits of what I can achieve on my own. I now live in Oxford. Tiny, densely populated, and kept in a property chokehold by a University that refuses to relinquish grasp over the city. My room costs £850, not including bills. Since finishing university (in-itself traumatising, for another time) I've worked at a charity in the city. Whilst grateful, it isn't enough to pay for my overpriced room - I've had to take on secret second and third jobs, hoping that my friends and co-workers don't notice the increasingly dark circles under my eyes as I work longer hours each week. I collapsed in angry tears in front of the mental health team when they said I should have some time off and go on holiday. If you fucking pay for it! They didn't call me back.

For nine months I felt like a robot with a piece missing; just about able to work, but completely unable to engage in anything outside of it. I'd come home and see that hormone blockers for children were being banned, that Labour kept saying *Women have vaginas, men have penises*, the Equality Act

is going to be rewritten and Rishi Sunak made a transphobic joke in front of the grieving mother of a trans girl. But I couldn't do anything. I was always working when marches occurred, or simply so sleep deprived that I could barely take care of myself let alone attend a vigil. This year, five men have challenged me in the street because I look queer. One of them spat in my face. I couldn't feel anything except numb. My ability to resist oppression has been cauterised through an exhaustion caused by a broken rental market.

This Pride month, all the estate agencies near where I live have had pride flags in their window, interleaved in-between £1.5 million detached houses in Chipping Norton and banal phrases such as Everyone is Equal. I couldn't stop looking at the one displayed in my estate agent's window. I wanted to smash them with a brick. Working 60+ hours per week to pay them for an overpriced room is the key reason I've been unable to resist concerted transphobic attacks over the last year. They'd evicted me to increase the rent by £200 per month and they said Love is Love.

Saying that corporate pride is empty is not revolutionary. But seeing those displays made me realise why some people see trans rights and revolutionary change as separate competing forces - the image of a wealthy trans landlord raising rents in his buy-to-let investment property comes to mind. But it is a false dichotomy to state that fixing material conditions and improving the lives of trans people are two different things. The assumption that trans people are bratty, privileged and middle class children - indulging in Luxury Beliefs, as the new catchphrase goes - deliberately ignores the swathes of trans people trapped within our broken rental markets. Being trans does not preclude you from being evicted. It makes it worse.

Trans exhaustion is an epidemic and it will only get worse. The moral panic is not going anywhere. Cis people need to understand that we cannot resist forever - the mental, physical and financial hit is too great for many of us to take. Cis allyship is more important than ever. Join a march. Drive your trans friend to the vigil. Occupy buildings. Help raise money for a trans person whose prescription got blocked. We will all

end up like me if we continue as we are: numb, disconnected, and vulnerable. The process of trans advocacy is always at the beck and call of those with more money, more land, and more power - so help us.

There was so much more I wanted to write here. I'm unhappy with how this article turned out. But I think, in the raggedy incompleteness of article that was written whilst being evicted from my home, I've demonstrated the point I wanted to make. ●

NO MORE STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

Adam Cogan

Two recent images best demonstrate the nature of class politics in Britain today. First, a quivering Keir Starmer denounces audience members for laughing at him mentioning his dad was a toolmaker—again. He fails to understand (or purposely omits to) that the audience isn't laughing at the fact his dad worked in a factory. They're laughing at his repetitively crass and robotic attempt at building his political brand as a working class ally. Second, a relaxed Nigel Farage sits on a country bench, confidently admitting that he had it easy compared to some as he looks over idyllic pastureland and blows some dog whistles.

As I write, Farage's party, Reform UK, stands ready (according to some polls) to overtake the Tories at the ballots, signalling an unprecedented shift in the balance of British politics. Labour is looking to win a landslide, but Starmer is set to be one of the most unpopular prime ministers in history. The Greens are also predicted to make some gains, though mainly in their usual progressive middle-class strongholds. Elsewhere in Europe, the centre is crumbling, and the far right is gleefully sweeping in.

Meanwhile, liberals look on in horror as their repeated attempts to neutralise right-wing populists fail or backfire. Whether this is attempted through digging up compromising dirt that doesn't stick because the man with the shovel already stinks of shit. Or by shifting to the right to try to pander, which doesn't work because people like Coca-Cola, not the watery off-brand. At its heart, this is a failure to understand disenchantment. It's also a colossal misunderstanding of desire and the way the right formats desire in incredibly effective ways. Running through and compounding these factors is a pervasive anti-intellectualism and moralism that have plagued left, and especially liberal, spaces for a while now.

NOTHING DOING; LET'S DO SOMETHING

Keir Milburn has correctly noted how life under contemporary capitalism

DEFEND THE WEST



#001 LES TROIS GRACES

has become gamified from above. From language learning apps (Duolingo), exercise (Strava), to everyday basic social interaction through dating apps, social media, and the workplace—where companies like Amazon and Lyft have introduced incentives such as streak bonuses and virtual pets workers can win by performing well. While everywhere we are encouraged to compete in order to win, it is becoming increasingly clear that for 99% of people, there is no winning. Oppressive material conditions, alienating and exploitative work, and feckless political leadership combine to severely limit the belief of our era’s atomised individual in their own agency.

As Max Haiven writes, “life under neoliberal capitalism is felt by many as if trapped in an unwinnable game in a disenchanted world.” Disenchanted implies there is no longer a sense of the new, of the different and exciting. It designates an advanced stage of that “slow cancellation of the future” described by Mark Fisher. Replaced instead by a banal drudgery constantly overshadowed by very real existential threats and underpinned by an oppressive, dystopic “cost of living”.

The result is best understood via Spinoza. As external causes produce negative effects in individuals and reduce their power to act in the world, their sense of agency—to impact and control their lives—wither away. For Spinoza, this means one is less able to understand the true causes of things, leading to confused, “inadequate” views of the world. This leaves one susceptible to being influenced, to being overcome by “passions” that occlude reason and understanding. The rise of the extreme right and its various auxiliary manifestations (QAnon conspiracy theorists, the alt-right, Red Pill misogynists) can be partly understood through the concept of disenchantment and its effects. Members of the Italian writer collective Wu Ming (who make the compelling claim that QAnon was inspired by their novel *Q*) explain that QAnon is essentially a massively-multiplayer “alternative reality game” in which “players” work together to interpret and uncover clues about a shadowy cabal of paedophilic elites who are controlling society and waging war on everyday people and their champion-defender—Donald Trump. It’s worth noting here that QAnon is not confined to

the US but has a considerable foothold in the UK, too. The game-like nature of QAnon, according to Wu Ming 1, serves to re-enchant the world, restoring agency and purpose in relation to a supposed collective struggle. It provides a frame for people to understand why the world is the way it is and gives them the means to fight for change.

The Red Pill sphere, and here I will focus on incels as one aspect of it, is instead composed mainly of men who—though specifics differ—are reacting against a society they perceive to be rigged against them. These individuals are “involuntarily celibate” (though in fact, many incels have had or are even having



sexual relations) because “Chads” and “Stacys” (conventionally attractive men and women) monopolise relations between themselves. “Becky” (the educated, outspoken, but undesirable woman—a misogynistic caricature of a feminist) causes annoyance for the “Virgin” (the eponymous incel).

David Koehler of the Germany-based deradicalisation institute GIRDS notes that for extremists of all stripes, “personal and societal problems are explained by a worldwide conspiracy”. In this case, the conspiracy is one against “low-ranking” men, and the conspirators are women, especially feminists, LGBTQ people, “woke” liberals, lefties, and

others (this naturally leads to a version of the racist Great Replacement Theory, where non-white people apparently increasingly monopolise white women). Bettina Rottweiler, an expert on incel terrorism and long-suffering reader of incel lone ranger manifestos, sees the response manifested as “a desire to violently take revenge on the society that is denying [things] to you”.

Both QAnon and Red Pill philosophy are closely related to the alt-right—a mostly online phenomenon that finds its outlet in memes, trolling, and pranks with a view towards furthering extreme right-wing political causes—as well as sowing general mayhem for the “kek” (simultaneously an alternative for “lol” and the satirical frog-headed deity of the alt-right). The alt-right has produced its highly effective and, at times, astonishingly creative aesthetic culture, defined by a patchwork of nostalgic retro-modern genres like vaporwave (recreated as fashwave), neo-Nazi accelerationist “skullmask” art, 4chan-era memes, and a recent see-it-to-believe-it distillation of each form: Dark MAGA. The significance of alt-right aesthetics is the topic of a whole other piece. Suffice it to say that underpinning this culture is a deep nihilism—a celebration of (self-) destruction and chaos, often with figures like Donald Trump as vectors.

Across these subcultures, a pattern emerges. Individuals who feel their power to act in the world has been limited lash out, overcome by what Spinoza would view as sad passions, and reach an incorrect—often conspiracy-laden—analysis of the causes of their condition. Such individuals rebuild their sense of agency through direct intervention in a re-enchanted world (QAnon), through violent reaction (or voyeuristic fantasy of it—many incels worship shooters), or by proxy—through a strongman who is seen as a harbinger of chaos (i.e., a threat to order), a populist who positions themselves against the intransigent establishment and promises real change, or—in a commonly used construction—who promises to penetrate “The Matrix”. It begins to become clear, whether we on the left like it or not, why these outlets have such a powerful gravitational pull for many disaffected, disenchanting people who are genuinely crushed by stagnant material conditions and a rising cost of living and who see in the political establishment nothing but more of the same.



It's important to note the predominantly male, often white, character of these overlapping bases, as well as their somewhat cross-sectional class composition. The traditional avenues for toxic male privilege to fully actualise itself by its own standards under patriarchal capitalism have largely been closed off. It's harder to be "the man of the house," the breadwinner (and, by extension, a "Chad"), when you can't even get a job or pay the rent, never mind buy a house. Grifters like Andrew Tate play on this narrative, decrying a masculinity under attack and seeking to "teach" men (and more so young boys) how to be a "real man," get rich, and dominate women. Despite their highly unsavoury nature, the undeniable popularity of such figures needs to be engaged with seriously, not simply moralised against, for it to be countered. A revitalised class politics—and more on this below—is central to that.

In essence, the extreme right and its affiliated subcultures are successfully able to take advantage of existing material conditions and their very real effects. They are quicker to perceive disenchantment and the topology of desire and manipulate these

“ ... This sacred icon is portrayed as being threatened by, varyingly, immigrants, trans peoples, “ cultural Marxists”, or indeed blood-harvesting rich paedophiles.”

factors, offering reactionary causal chains and solutions, stirring up a nostalgia (both aesthetically and ideologically) for supposed better days and the traditional values that, as the story goes, once stood unchallenged by “woke” chicanery.

By drawing on and developing cultural/identitarian tropes, the right is able to form a more or less cohesive, cross-class base that, while by no means exclusively white, can for all intents and purposes be boiled down to an abstracted notion of a “white working class”. This is a construction based on an idealised (and fantastical) portrait of native (i.e., white) “working people” (to use a label much loved by Keir Starmer): traditional,

ethnically diverse parts of the working class, insisting that what matters most is not a shared relationship to the means of production but how one looks, talks, and acts, where they live, where they're from, and other somewhat arbitrary markers. This cultural approach to defining class is dangerous—nationalism is its logical conclusion. Unfortunately, this approach has become dominant across the political spectrum.

CLASS AND ITS DISCONTENTS ON THE LEFT

There are two concerning tendencies on the left: one is to reject class politics altogether. The other, often carried by justifiably annoyed working class activists, is to reject more robust, materialist conceptions of class in favour of cultural approaches. In reference to the first tendency to reject class politics altogether (and this is usually not done explicitly), this is something common to both liberals and usually more privileged sections of the left. Some limited observations from my own experience as a working class student studying a radical ecological economics course mainly populated by middle-class activists, environmentalists, and academics

honest, hard-working, conservative, holding "family" values. For men, there is an additional aestheticization of manual work. This sacred icon is portrayed as being threatened by, varyingly, immigrants, trans people, "cultural Marxists", or indeed even blood-harvesting rich paedophiles.

This ethno-cultural conception of the working class fragments real working class solidarity. It allows for a cross-class identification with the abstracted category of white worker (cross-class because many of those identifying with this nostalgic portrait are not working class people at all). It does this while driving a wedge between culturally or

speak, in my view, to these broader issues. Beyond my studies, I've also been involved with a broad community of activists and organisers who define themselves as anti-capitalists, leftists, socialists, anarchists, "degrowthers," or whatever else.

The most striking thing is what Jodi Dean has already described as a fixation on "affective loops" of process (the term she uses to describe the cyclic enjoyment derived from the act of participating in political actions—the enjoyment being in the activity rather than its actual fulfilment, its completion, its victory). Often, these activities themselves become paralysed by a monastic hypercritique that only those who don't have to work can afford to get involved in. The issue is that this is supposed to be, if certain classist narratives are to be believed, the educated intellectual vanguard of progressive movements. Its built-in classism and implicit rejection of meaningful class politics, oddly academical anti-intellectualism, and sanctimony lead to frustration from class conscious people on the left and confirm the suspicions of those on the right.

This also serves to associate the left with the liberal centre, even as the latter contorts itself into ever wilder shapes in order to move rightward. Both are seen, perhaps not incorrectly, as failing to engage with the disenchanted and their desires from a place of real understanding. Instead offering a seemingly weak and ineffective politics led by leaders who pretend to be one of the people. Just like Starmer, who seeks to relate to the public with empty words and tired family histories. On the other hand, Farage and Trump are both astoundingly popular because they comfortably flaunt their privilege and barely disguise their faults with a knowing wink, embodying the chaos of a (phoney) ultra-honesty and offering—if current events are anything to go by—a powerful and winning politics. It was Leon Trotsky, of all people, who—writing almost a hundred years ago in *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It*—mapped out how, if the left appears weak and indecisive at times of crisis, the petty bourgeoisie (small business owners, etc.) and broad swathes of the working class will turn away from it and move right. This is a lesson we would do well to learn from.

Referring to the second tendency, the cultural

approach on the left differs significantly from its right-wing iteration in that it does not rest on traditionalist idealisations in the same way. However, it does still idealise a working class culture that was a product of the post war boom and welfare state of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. While those material conditions have long since been destroyed, that culture—and a nostalgic attachment to it—echoes into the present.

There can therefore be a similar tendency to lean on some of the same superficial cultural markers already mentioned. This can sometimes, unfortunately, come with a bizarre form of populist anti-intellectualism that counterintuitively (and certainly unintentionally) feeds into stereotypes of working class people as being salt-of-the-earth simpletons who cannot handle big words. Mark Fisher himself fought his entire life against this anti-intellectual tendency, arguing for making theory popular "without being populist, intellectual without being academic."

The problem with this cultural class politics is that it is, much like its right mirror, backward-looking—nostalgic. To be more specific, it is "hauntological" in the sense that it is based on a yearning for a present and future that was once imagined but failed to be realised. This manifests as hanging on to a class identity that was formed in the industrial glory days of old and hoping for its just recognition in the present, i.e., to be better represented in activist or environmentalist spaces.

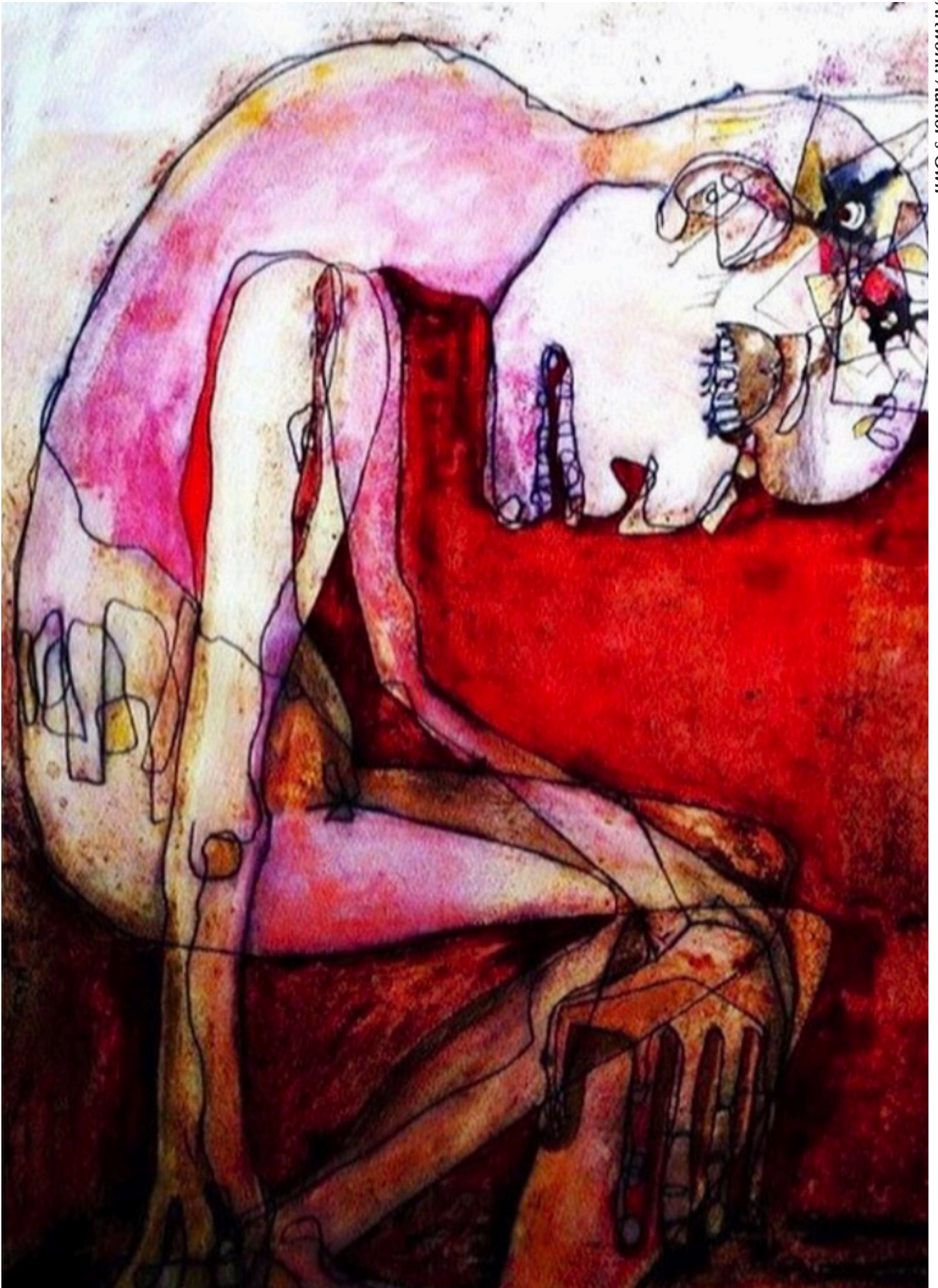
The notion of a working class identity in the UK is often (though definitely not always, especially within the big cities) based on the remnants of a culture that was formed on no longer existing material conditions. Such an approach can't work because the composition of the Western working class today, economically,

ethnically, etc., is no longer the same. As we have seen, this approach—while generally well meaning—is more likely to lead to a chauvinistic defensiveness of perceived “traditional working class values” and “identity” (something abundantly clear across Europe and the US). It is evident we need a working class politics that addresses contemporary desires and disenchantments, not ones that were lost to the past. A politics both timeless in its final analysis of what class is, but also temporally contingent in that it is situated in the present and looks towards the future (while learning from past failures—not worshipping them).

In doing this, the close interplay of the material and cultural (insofar as they can actually be separated) needs to be acknowledged carefully: neither a vulgar materialism, nor a shallow culturalism. A class politics then needs to be experimental and forward thinking, aesthetic and novel, but theoretically sound and historically situated—both fluid and rigid. Not reliant on outdated forms and tropes that do more to divide and breed defensiveness than build actual class consciousness and power.

I’ve spent a lot of time talking about the extreme right precisely because there is a tendency on the left and liberal centre to dismiss people on the right as simply daft. In fact, the right is doing extremely well—they are winning elections and growing in strength and influence, shifting political norms and narratives to places that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. They have also conjured up effective aesthetic forms that they use to disseminate their ideas all over the internet. The left, on the other hand, is not doing so well. We often fall back on the same tired aesthetics—red and black, hammers and sickles and letter As, pictures of old communists or anarcho-punk pastiches.

We appear to some as uninterested in future victory and more on present purity, caught in affective loops. It’s vital for the left to offer a response to disenchantment and disaffection. To position itself as the only way of fulfilling a collective desire for something beyond the present state of things. This requires reviving the communist horizon as objective, re-enchanting the world with the possibility of a reclaimed future. This likewise requires renewing a sensuous aesthetic culture based on experimentation, a prefiguration of art in a liberated world. Lastly, and crucially, this requires the reconstruction of a robust class politics whose primary purpose is the realisation of the collective, highly developed class consciousness needed to form the agent of revolutionary change: the united working class. ●



PAWN ONE TAKES KING

Yap

It's all about the lens you see humanity through. Man in all his glory, eh? The story of our rise out of the dark of a monkey head. Sisters at our side since the beginning of time, facing the storm together. Children at the fire, as the centre of all things sacred. Sovereign beings. Sovereign head collected. What's not to love? What's not to cherish forever? Ultimately, it's about what we hold up on high, because if we are to talk along class lines, we need a measure of righteousness to know ourselves by.

Sovereignty is a big notion. The sovereign rights of the individual. Each and every sovereign individual, held to the sacred laws of the collective head. Class at its very core undermines the notion of sovereignty. It divides the sovereign individual along three distinct lines. It presupposes three separate ontologies by definition of its stance. Upper, middle

and the rest of us. Never has a word been uttered that could justify any of it in an intelligent manner.

Upstairs/downstairs, mindset. Identities pegged to the pathology of illusion. A cognitive tangle of myriad knots if ever there was a knot in the great net of life. Lines drawn in the sand where there weren't any. Such an ugly crayon on the canvas of life. A story with a sad ending for so many. Station and place. Master and servant. Know your place at the table. Know what face to wear around what's his face in the silly hat? Ideological claptrap. A rat trap to catch the gullible. A fist to stomp out the troublemakers. And it was, and still is, all of that and more, sad to say.

No one ever sees it coming, do they? Always right under our noses waiting to pop. The working-class seedling that becomes the oak tree. Giant raised by dwarfs, regaining its status. Forgive the brag, but since that's the howl of man on this day, I think I'll howl mine up at the moon. Class is a split in the ontological matrix. A glitch in the abstract lens. A spiritual mishap. A phenomenological crash of such mindboggling proportions, I'm surprised the snake hasn't eaten itself already, right down to the bones of a black hole.

A classification of what exactly? Where are the class lines in the sand and what are they trying to tell us? A classification of music and art. A classification of code and cell. A classification of language and emotion. A classification of justice and the axioms that give it tract. A classification of morality. A classification of science and philosophy. A classification of fish into monkey into man. All these things that make us beautiful. Our complex verse. A classification of body and spirit. I don't know about you, but I can't find the lines that divide any of it.

To classify, is to set a perspective of reality aside for inspection. To draw a line around a thing that is, so as to see it for its own accords. A classification of refinement. We might begin there given that is what the toffs have lauded over us for centuries. What does it mean to be refined? The idea that some are more refined than others by virtue of what they are born into, is just a bag of drivel. What an ugly fucking head. To see man and woman in separate

hats, is beyond all things sacred. What is it to be sacred? To classify sacredness for the source that it is, within all. To see one another as sacred beings that require tenderness and love to thrive; that we are not to be undermined by the hand of another for their own sick game; that is what refinement is.

Refinement is a huge notion. One circle at the round table. One hand around the centre fire holding everyone as equal. Immutable contract. To hold the other up as sacred as I stated. It is what law is said to stand on. Unless of course I missed a meeting. *Salus Populi Suprema Lex.* - Let the health of the people be the supreme law. The sovereign individual. Inalienable rights. Not to be messed with. Not to be conquered or mentally colonised. Not to be put down at the expense of another. What do you think enlightenment is about if not that? Refinement is my light. Our light. It is the way out of the darkness.

To undermine what is, is to deceive the self. To allow the self to diminish in front of all that we hold up as moral and just, is a fool's game. To walk the crooked path. To sell one's soul for a silver spoon and the seat that says first class. A chandelier and big house. All the maids one needs to clean it. What a bag of dirty, and small, and pitiful. Pitiful upper class. Pitiful middle. Broken, battered, worn, torn; borne out of lies and savagery, the rest of us. Unless of course I missed a meeting.

What a muddle we are lost in? Nothing but a schizophrenic monkey without the line of its own arrow if you ask me. There's no poetry behind it. Class distinction is a dirty bastardisation of what is, no matter what way you play it. It speaks of a weak mindset and a tongue wed to a narrative of bad language. The Queen's English my ass. She couldn't even spell woman. Not the way I spell woman anyhow. As in, giant. As in, equal. As in, never to be exploited for one's own gains. As in, never to be set apart from the fire as less than.

One has to enter the lens of phenomenology to see it the way it is. We know enough now to say with a modicum of certainty that we are not the body. It appears to be nothing more than a conduit for a higher order. I am not a body of limbs and organs if you will, rather, I am a network of systemic modes.

A set of a' priori modes that sit in all, for the purpose of synthesising our place in the world. A set of modes that allow for mathematics and science. A set that governs rational thought. A set that allows us to engage with the world in a meaningful manner. One set to rule it all. One measure in all of us as something monumental. No dividing lines to be seen in its spill.

We are starting to grow up. We are a transcendental story, not a story of arrogance and ignorance. We are the light within that keeps pulling us forward. We are a class of divinity, scattered, yes, but nonetheless, we are that in every sense of the word. We are the story of a giant trying to overcome and win the day for all. We are a story of a species coming back together after our long evolutionary mile, and it is around our complex nature that we will unite. We are one divine head by virtue of what carries us.

I am no longer a working-class lad from a small town in Ireland. I am a transcendental class of being. The categories of division are just too small for me to carry. Continue to walk in whatever shoes you want to, but remember from here on out, the giants are back at the table. If we are to evolve, then let it be along the line that gives us magnitude as Oneness. Pawn one takes King, because there's just no way out of the kind of majesty that joins us at the hip. ●

**WE ARE A CLASS OF
DIVINITY, SCATTERED,
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**WE ARE THE STORY OF
A GIANT TRYING TO
OVERCOME AND WIN
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A TALE OF TWO WORLDS

Inequality in
decision making
makings in the
workplace, and
the production
of class.

Isaac Bell Holmström

“National economic growth” is not for the nation, the nation has been split in two. The highest earners, once taxed at 90% of their income, now bat away half-hearted HMRC requests like flies. The nature of power has changed, power has evolved, shifted, and found new forms of expression. As inequality, inflation, and profits continue to rise, the working class has become fragmented, left behind - power continues to burn forwards at lightning speed, out of reach, into the stratosphere. I want to define class, what class means in the world we live in, this world of precarious labour and financial speculation. The workplace, as a snapshot of life at its most mundane, shows painfully clearly these hierarchies in our lives, and represents the way that class in modern life has taken on almost cosmic proportions.

This is a question of power, not just the power over something, over someone, but power at a more fundamental level, the power to make change, the ability, *the capacity to act*. This capacity to express yourself, to make changes, is the basis of a democratic system in which everyone has a voice, the right to participate, to be remembered and trusted and included and cared for. Power is the foundation of the way in which the workplace creates and defines class in the 21st century - the great separation of those with power, from those without, the disconnection between those that make decisions, and those that receive orders. Although this dynamic is found everywhere in society, by looking to the workplace specifically



we can understand the production and reproduction of class through the separation of decision-making powers, in relation to modern class analysis and the building of a more just future.

Today two worlds exist, two realms, with different populations, cultures, and perceptions of the other. Together they make up the modern economy – the material realm and the financial realm. The financial realm, made up of banks, investors, shareholders, and tax havens is the product of those with decision-making powers, gradually using that power to remove themselves from the material realm. They operate almost outside the natural laws that govern our

world. This world of delocalised finance is outside of geography – dollars, pounds, euros, yen, flow in and out without barriers, taking physical form only in the tax havens of Panama, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the City of London, Jersey. In this realm, transactions and profits can arise from interactions with little to no relevance to the material world, to reality – the financing and trading of debt, for one example. Computer algorithms can be set up remotely to trade ownership rights of land and art and stocks, many times in a second, according to miniscule fluctuations in foreign prices – trades that lead to incredible profits, despite no physical change in the material world.

These trades, gambles, bets, do not operate to improve working conditions, wages, or the productivity of the worksite, but for shareholder

value – to line the pockets of people that likely have never seen the worksite, who have no connection to the business other than an email notification. It is for these people that a business is run, that wealth is funnelled to. This lack of familiarity with the material conditions is not a meaningless, whimsical observation – people with little emotional investment in an enterprise are able to make decisions as they wish, based on their own perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations, regardless of the lives that these decisions impact. The fact that those professional executives that populate the boards of directors of these corporations can move freely between such boards – Nicholas Shaxson in *Treasure Islands* identifies one man working, officially, on over 450 boards of directors at one time – is a testament to the *distance* between them and the worker

that spends 8 hours at work, another 2 in commute, and the rest of the time recovering.

The material realm, on the other hand, is made up of manufacturing, the worksite, the café, the office, the factory. The material realm is where we find the means of production, the production of value, but paradoxically, also we find those elements of the economy which are seen as limitations, barriers, restrictions to value. A financial transaction could be perfectly planned, carried out and concluded, but if the milk bottles are left outside too long by mistake, it is the restaurant that suffers.

An example - a local newspaper, where online comments from readers are received, filtered and edited, to be included in the next edition. But this newspaper is owned by a corporation, which in turn owns many newspapers across the country, and the whole

corporation is run by a small board of directors. These people have not worked for any of the newspapers they run, nor have they visited the offices, seen the communities in which they work, written the pages. But they have the power. And so, when they set quotas for “reader engagement”, requiring this newspaper to include all comments that it is sent by readers, unfiltered and unedited, the newspaper must comply.

In this example, taken from a conversation with a friend working at this newspaper, the two realms are shown in stark contrast. In one, the financial realm, the newspapers that the corporation owns are perceived like machines, running nicely and quietly in another room – they can be tweaked, adjusted, and if they stop working, they can be sold for parts. But in the material realm, there are pressures, there are limitations. Of course hate speech cannot be published, but what about other offensive material? What about conspiracy theories, or personal details, or nonsensical comments that the newspaper is responsible for publishing? Then there is the question of the physical number of pages, how many pages of comments can they include, can they afford to print? These are relevant

questions for the running of a newspaper, and they have a massive effect on readership – but they have nowhere to go, the distance between the material and the financial is too wide for them to bridge, and it is the newspaper that suffers.

This idea of pressures, material constraints on what is possible and practical, is connected to experience, to knowledge gained through action and familiarity with the site. Those best informed on the conditions and capacities of the business are those working within the business, those that see the results of decisions made from directors and managers, often those tasked with picking up the pieces when things go wrong. The gulf that separates these two realms is immense, and dependent on the radically different laws that operate under the respective environments. For the factory, rising minimum wages act as a pressure on the company, something to be avoided, lamented, dodged. But the CEO? The CEO’s wage of course should rise year upon year, regardless of the material conditions of the world in which their factory operates.

Economic activity is not the only identifier or producer of class in a pluralistic society – consumption, politics, race, gender, sexuality, income, language, education, all affect perceptions of class in unfathomable ways. But there is a disturbing level of inequality around decision-making in the workplace, the site in which most adults spend the majority of their time, either labouring in or preparing themselves to labour in. Richard Wolff’s *Democracy at Work* notes that “most workers in most modern capitalist corporations are required by law and/or custom to accept working conditions over which they exercise no democratic control. If they refuse, they can be fired—and the primary option available to them is to work for another employer under similarly undemocratic conditions.” These power dynamics reinforce an antagonism and separation that is only reinforced with the rise of platform work like Deliveroo, in which instructions come in the form of faceless messages on an app, for which innumerable deliver drivers risk dangerous accidents to obey.

These are groups of people robbed of their capacity to act, robbed of trust and respect. This is where we find the definition of class, this is where we must

start to rebuild, to organise, to trust. The material world is not helpless – a well-timed strike can bring down a corporation, the right protest can change a country, the roles we have been given can become tools to construct a new model of trust. Power can be a thing we grant each other, a way to grow, a way to heal. The material world is where we find love and solidarity, and it is from here that we begin.

Models exist for bringing democracy into the workplace. From Germanic models of workers rights, to stronger unions, to co-operatives and worker self-directed enterprises, to anarchism, socialism, and communism, there are ways to bridge these realms. At the more moderate end of the spectrum, these take the form of including workers on the boards of directors, and by replacing shareholder dividends with worker bonuses. At the more extreme end

is the abolition of management, of the worksite being run for the benefit of everyone, instead of the profit of the few. What is common among these models is a respect for the decisions made by those with the most familiarity with the means of production, with the worksite, a respect for the judgement of the worker over what is produced, what is invested in, how many hours are worked, who is hired. Without such models of wealth redistribution, equality and trust, an environment of hostility, distance, and impersonal management becomes pervasive, endemic, so deep-rooted that it becomes a core element of modern conceptions of class. ●



AGENCY, GO HOME! An Odyssey of Temporary Labour Some Migrant

Because life isn't linear and definitely not always under our control, I did a little time loop and, after more than 15 years, I was back to working at a food production factory on a "temporary" contract by one of the city's many employment agencies. Not only I needed money but I was interested in what changed in those years and how my own memories are different from the current reality. As part of this little experiment I decided to pretend that my English is not as fluent as it really is. I have to admit I wanted an opportunity to troll the supervisors and managers better but unfortunately did not have that many chances to actually do that. I did some notes while working

and I am writing two months after quitting so my memory is still quite fresh. If you find the below loose and somewhat chaotic let it be a testament to my poor note taking skills and not a proof that I am making this shit up.

The recruitment process was super easy; after one phone call, I was told to come to the office. Located on the first floor in a building that has seen better times but surprisingly had a guard at the main entrance, the corridor greeted me with a poster advertising "warehouse jobs available now!". Two or three Black guys entered before me, and when asked by the woman at the counter what kind of job they were looking for, they replied in their basic English that it was the "warehouse job" they were after. The woman almost screamed at them that there were no warehouse jobs available and she could offer them a "chicken factory". They politely said they weren't interested and left. She didn't even bother to say goodbye. When it was my turn I asked for the chicken place straight away and was given a form to fill. Loads of pages with small print and internal signatures marked the newest one as generated in 2012. So far, back to the past. The experience was like travelling back to 2007. I slowly filled the form, and went back to the counter. I could see people sitting in front of their computers and hear them chatting about lunch meals and other things, but no one bothered to come and take the forms. After a couple of minutes, one grabbed it on the way back from the loo and said that they would call me. They didn't. So I came back after two days and was given a number to call to arrange an induction. If you think that they were rude to me you are right. But also, this is a method of establishing the simple, but important fact that is elementary to your work for the agency:

Your time is not important. We, the agency, decide what counts as work time, how and when to contact you, and how long or short an advance we will give you before asking you to work, go home, or change the work placement. That way, not only will you be trying harder to satisfy us, but you will also become more dependent, and as a sweet bonus, you won't have the option to plan silly moves like a job interview elsewhere.

It may sound like a conspiracy theory, but I don't believe that what at first glance looks like the lack of structure is a coincidence. When I look at how everything works at an agency, it becomes clear that it is a mini-system of quite real oppression designed or evolved in practice to control the immigrant workforce better. Take the "temporary" nature of the agency work in factories.

Some people might think of agency workers as some kind of freelancers or gig economy app-workers but this is far from reality. You work at the same place and have the same starting hours for weeks, report to the same supervisors, and have the same responsibilities as full-time staff. You need to reply to the text message to confirm your attendance and, in theory, can say you are not coming that day. But when I tried that, I was immediately called by the agency coordinator, who strongly hinted that if I didn't come, there would be no more shifts for me in the future. I also received "attendance mandatory" texts. By the way, the text would be sent whenever they felt like it. For the shift starting at 3pm, I received it as early as 8am and as late as 1pm. On some days, I didn't receive it at all, so I stayed at home with no chance to make any plans for the day off. Being "offered" a shift (in the language they use you are "offered" a shift so you better be grateful) doesn't mean that you will work 8 hours.

During weekdays, it wasn't unusual for the production to slow down an hour or two before the end of the afternoon shift, and one of the managers would go around to shout, "agency, go home!". We were required to leave early, and our machines and places at the lines were taken over by the permanent staff, so their workplaces could be shut down and cleaned earlier without paying the cleaners any overtime. I worked on a fixed shift that required us to work Saturdays in exchange for Mondays off. Saturdays were always busy, so we often worked 10-12 hours. But because they "saved" those 4 hours by sending us home on Tuesday, Wednesday and, say, Friday, the additional hours on Saturday did not exceed the contracted 40 hours, so no overtime for you, baby! If anything, this is cheaper for the factory as the Saturday shift was a morning one, so they did not have to pay us a higher rate for the afternoon. Saving money everywhere. Win.

Wasting your time, being unpredictable with it and juggling with work hours are not the only methods of control. Another one is straight-on dehumanisation and rudeness. Agency staff wear different colours of hair nets than regular workers, and supervisors and management have yet another colour. So you know who is who at the first glance. Some agency workers are used to filling the gaps where production is busier on a given day so they move every day to a different work placement. When I did that for a couple of days no one bothered to explain to us what we actually should do so I had to watch what others were doing or ask a person next to me to explain. If the supervisor noticed you doing something wrong it was always along the lines "you! what's your number? what you doing? you want to work here? do correct!".

Above it's a quote from one supervisor who, in my head, I called the Handsome Bastard. But Handsome Bastard wasn't

a particularly rude exception; he was a norm. Most of the time, when addressed by a random supervisor, I was asked for my number, not my name. When I ended up at the same line everyday my supervisor learned my name. But he never bothered with “plug the gap” dudes. Agency coordinators were also rude but in a “funny”, cocky way. Each of the agencies present in that factory had a person who was there most of the time to organise “their” staff and plan the shifts in cooperation with the factory managers. “My coordinator” told me once: “if you fail to report again I will not pay you”. A dude from another agency loved to boast to Muslims and Sikh ladies about his drinking exploits and hookups. Mercily, they didn’t understand most of his bullshit due to their level of English.

Working hard to prove yourself and receive a promise of more permanent placement at the same line everyday that was also a promise of receiving a

text message every day caused people to compete for the best places as packing or any place that was a bit warmer than the main hall. So, if you had any romantic impression about worker solidarity with the agency workers, forget it. The system is refined by now and won’t allow it. But of course, you crave normal, human contact, and you talk to others and even become friends of some sort. But you know there are the options to keep the shift work or to be offered the Holy Grail of permanent contract: you or them would have to choose. Most have families, children and debt acquired to even come to this country. So you know what they will choose and what you will do. So, the solidarity is limited to helping somebody lift a very heavy box or covering for them when they run to the bathroom. Don’t expect much.

After less than two months, I found something better. Nothing changed in 15 years, the system is even more refined and mature in exploiting us. I will not be offering you any ideas on how to change it. I think we both know. ●

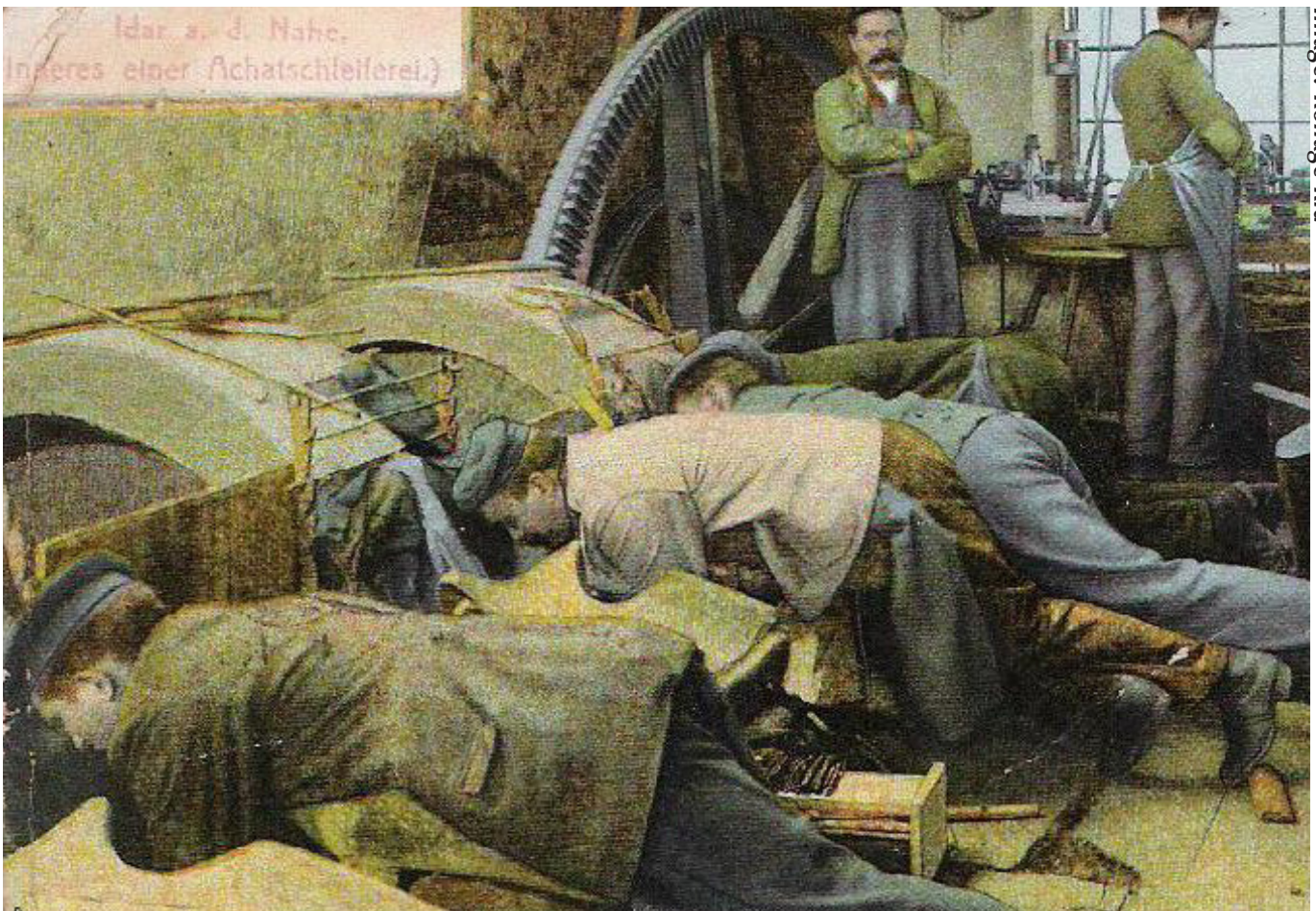


Image: Kollage Kid

EVERYTHING CHANGES TO BE THE SAME

My fear of being poor Real Utopian Dreams

It's been 5 years since Chile woke up, and so have I.

When students took to the streets in Santiago, Chile in 2019 to protest against another transport fare raise and against a political class completely disconnected from the life of everyday people, I understood how I had been stripped of my freedom of choice since birth. Freedom to choose my values, my way of life, and my way of love, sadly not only by force but also by design. I saw myself in many, in their pain, their disbelief, their sadness for the lack of social justice, and the scale of the destruction and exploitation. Those extra 30 pesos in the transport fare ignited the indignity in which Chileans had been conditioned to live for the last 30 years, which was reflected by the protests' slogan. *"Nos son 30 pesos, son 30 años"* [it is not 30 pesos, it is 30 years]. Chile had recovered the illusion of democracy from a neoliberal dictatorship in 1989; everything changed, and it stayed the same.

As a child of the system who didn't question a thing, I can say that, yes, ignorance could be bliss, though

only a superficial one. I had no interest in politics because it was meaningless to me [at the time]. I often heard, *"it doesn't matter who is in power, you have to work hard anyway to survive this life"*. Politics was a game played by those who had things to lose; I had nothing but my work. That was until I met one of my best friends in my 20s. She sat with me in the kitchen of the house where her parents lived and told me her parent's story and hers by default. She told me about her family's endurance of the exile, her sense of not belonging when she returned, and the many reasons why it all happened. I gained a new perspective. It was the seed that began to grow in me—curiosity on how others experienced life.

10 years later, away from my homeland, everything made sense to me. Our society is a factory of labour, slaves of the production system established by capitalism to legalise servitude and subjugation. A system that drains our souls, breaks our hearts, and rewires our brains from a very early age to make us compliant. The energy that has our atoms in constant movement is suppressed by stagnation in a system that only sees the material world and forgets the person. When I was little, I thought about what kind of work I would spend the rest of my life doing, and I could never stick to one; every profession I thought of came from the fear of being poor, but not knowing what that meant. Both of my parents had held the same kind of work for a long time, and that was my point of reference, and an unconscious pressure started weighing on me. I was placed in a pyramid where you can either make your way up or down, and it seemed impossible to get out.

I appreciate now that I was not at the bottom, because of my mum's "hard work" and that we experienced what is now called social mobility. Social mobility: do you want dignity? Then



Image: Author's Own

work harder to get to the next level, all because of inequalities. I learned the cost my mother had to pay for our social mobility. She chose - in a different context and with other life experiences - to move up by exchanging long hours of labour for unfair pay, caring for others, while her own children were left feeling uncared for. Many times I asked “*why did it have to be this way?*”.

She didn't go to school or learn to enhance her skills; she started working very young to afford to eat and put a roof over her head. In this society, you have to pay for those basic needs. By the time she was born, the world had already been split like a pie and had self-declared owners. There was no communal land or our original way of life. All had been erased by the colonisers in many places and replaced with their capitalistic practices. While the pretend owners make their profit on our backs, my mother was forced to choose to survive.

She never had options: what to study, when and where. There was no studying, only work, from dawn to dusk, and little time of her own. Her body took the hit with an extensive list of symptoms, all related to high levels of stress. Social mobility with no support from society is a long journey for many, sometimes with no end. For me, the labour level of this pyramid seemed free at first and after it started feeling more like a cage. My energy started seeping away and I was tired just from waking up. I had the illusion of change when I got access to more money to spend.

Yes, it all changed, and everything stayed the same.

My body shook me and rang the alarm. I had no motivation even to do the things I liked. All I thought of all day was how all the world's injustices made my heart ache. Genocide in Africa, deforestation of the Amazon, and the lack of care everywhere, are all connected. How about we all work hard to keep ourselves alive, make this a kinder place to live and not only for the profits of some? I opened my eyes to the greed around the world and the fakeness of all that I was once part of. It started - the battle of my own values vs my survival mode. It's back, my fear of being poor.

What does it mean to be poor? I wondered. When the land was enslaved, our connection to it cut off, and our culture and traditions destroyed, the description of vagabonds was born. With our rights stripped off, we were now called poor. Though it's just a description to compare us against someone that hoards food, properties and monetary wealth, I can still feel the shame it carries. All our basic needs are now commodities, and soon they will become a luxury. I am not poor. I know, I never was. I only have

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PARA CUIDAR
LA TIERRA
ES NECESARIO
SER UNA
RESISTENCIA
CONSCIENTE

PARA
HONRAR
LA TIERRA
ES
NECESARIO
LIMPIAR
LA TIERRA

PARA
HONRAR
LA TIERRA
ES
NECESARIO
PROTEGER
LA TIERRA



Image: Author's Own

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AND KNOWLEDGE ON
HOW TO KEEP HEALTHY.**

the same necessities as everyone else and have felt unloved.

I have come to understand how that fear is part of how the system works and keeps you choosing "hard work". There is little space for the person's evolution, for boredom, or for fun. You can have it, at a cost, with long-term savings, perhaps. I have different privileges than others within the labour class, and I understand that I don't have to feel guilty about it. Even though I rationalise all this, the wounds of the system are still here.

I grew up with an absent father, hard-working mother - loving surroundings - to what is love for them. The system took away my need for connection, so I never learned to feel safe. Drama and violence were part of the repertoire, scenes still come back to my mind. My lack of a feeling of safety still haunts me now, I have a place to sleep and food to put in my mouth. It's the fear of losing them that chases me. The scarcity mindset that I grew up with has not left me. Through therapy, I have learnt ways to cope with the pop-up thoughts that derail me from my daily life and the anxiety that lingers now that I have no official "work".

I daydream of a society where having a home to feel safe in is a right and not something that needs to be won by hard work, where there is access to nutritious food, paired with education about Nature, our bodies, and knowledge on how to keep healthy. Ownership of my time! A place where there is freedom to choose my own path at my own pace. I daydream that I work on myself and in my longing for communal connection, I work on making this world a safer place for everyone, regardless of our differences. I work on what is truly important for our survival and peaceful existence, not in making a person -who doesn't care for anyone else- richer every day. It scares me to the core to think that I can lose the

capacity to love others in these times full of hate, that I can destroy the world blindly, by indirect action, or even inaction. It scares me and saddens me to see that the greed of a few has entangled me in the needless consumption of things to fill the void of that unloved feeling I carry. I now understand the importance of prioritising connections, the unification of individuals and collectives' struggles for the primary need of survival. A complete reset. A reevaluation of our humanity. In capitalistic terms, a strategy update to all operational systems, to achieve our goal. Liberation. Peace. Love. I know I'm not the only one with the hope to build a different society, one that will flourish and turn the wheel of extinction to a new cycle of evolution for humanity. My fear turns to courage when I know I am not alone. I have grey days when the flashbacks cloud my knowledge of self and I get lost in the fog of despair, fed by the madness of current events all around the world. I know now that in that despair, it is the desperation to live that brings me back. The burning fire in my cells reminds me not to give in and not to give up.

The students back in Chile, the Palestinian movement, and my own thoughts and happiness are signs that we can resist the system's subjugation. Collectives and communities prove that I am one among many more. I see that we can change everything so that nothing stays the same anymore. ●

SORRY LABOUR - IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

The case for
community
power, regardless
of who's in
government

Jim Jepps

I like mashed potato. I do. I just don't know why you'd make it Prime Minister.

Anyway, welcome to our new Labour government. Does the air taste fresher, the water cleaner? Have your aching bones recovered, and your roof ceased to leak? I thought so. The shopping list grows longer, split into the things we need to survive and things that make surviving worthwhile. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a government that sorted that out for us? The good news is that there's a difference between governments. The bad news is that the difference is us, not them. This incoming Labour government is only going to be as good as we force it to be.

WE DIDN'T GET THE VOTE BY VOTING

Throughout history, every reform that's been won

was won because we fought for it. The people in charge were so uncomfortable they felt they had no option but to cut a bigger slice of the cake. And when I say uncomfortable, I don't always mean by eating their children, but let's not rule anything out right now.

One key to winning was that we set our own agenda rather than hoping that someone else's happened to overlap with ours. When we elect a government, that's an imperfect, collective decision, indicating roughly which unpopular direction we least despise.

But what if one of the choices likes to bomb people but is alright on wages?

What if one choice is great on gay rights but won't tackle the climate catastrophe? These are the compromises people make every time they mark that piece of paper and pop it in the box.

It probably makes a difference, but what determines, say, how racist the new government will be is whether the anti-racists are twisting the left arm tighter than the racists twist the right.

Maybe voting is one part of that Chinese burn. But if you vote Labour on the basis that they aren't Tories, then, frankly, that amounts to a blank cheque that doesn't affect what kind of government we're stuck with. If the vote of "good people" is sewn up, they'll get taken for granted with only monsters left to be won over.

If you want to influence Labour with your vote, make the finger-wagging moralisers earn it.

If you want ministers who don't sneer at the word immigrant, it's not about electing nicer people. You have to wipe the sneer off their face when it appears so they know racism comes at a cost. Otherwise, the only voices they'll hear are those of the basest Farragist slime.

The line they won't step over is drawn by all of us, crooked and straight. The landlords, mine owners and assorted plutocrats know where they want that line drawn. Shall we leave it up to them?

I say we must train our governments like dogs. They must obey our commands, not the other way around. We can teach them the habit of appearing human, but only if we force them to wear that little waistcoat and cowboy hat you like so much.

Sometimes, people say that if you don't support Labour, you are complaining "from the sidelines"—but what if you're in favour of pitch invasions?

Regardless, the idea that if you vote for the biggest party you have influence is laughable. They've influenced you, not the other way around. You've endorsed their agenda, and they will use the weight of their electoral success as a mandate for whatever horrors lurk beneath their polished surface. The only way we put our needs on the table is by existing as ourselves, as an independent force of will.

Some say you can get more influence by venturing into the belly of the beast. Sadly, my friends, that's a good way to get digested.

Sometimes, when you hear politicians talking about, for example, unemployment benefits, you'd be forgiven for thinking it was some kind of generous present handed down by a loving parent who, this year, thinks you've been spoiled and need to take a little more responsibility for yourself. The truth is benefits were introduced so the poor did not eat the rich.

Dress it up how you like, but it's set at a level to prevent the disenfranchised from looting cities. Maybe if people were a little more willing to devour the firstborn of the plutocrats, every now and then, as a treat, then those politicians might stop whining and remember they owe their privilege to the fact that people are generally too kind and too lazy to burn down the houses of the rich.

THE GHOSTS OF LABOUR PAST

When New Labour first won power in 1997, amongst the rhetoric against the homeless and freeing up the Bank of England, there were a series of reforms aimed at working people. Fairness at Work, the minimum wage, Sure Start. We can discuss how effective they were, but they got instituted not because Blair, Mandelson and Campbell were friends of the working class but because the unions and working people more generally had strong expectations that this is what they had been elected to do. People had put those expectations on hold for years, and that hunger needed feeding otherwise who knew where next they'd turn. The new government had to earn their right to the nuclear codes by instituting a few overdue reforms that the previous government had been too exhausted to implement themselves.

However, formal class struggle, like strikes, was at an all-time low, so many of those changes were cheap and cheerful, whilst the direction of travel around, say, privatisation, continued at a pace. By the time Labour left office in 2010 there had never been so many private companies making money out of the NHS, which had racked up large PFI and PPP debts to fund short term shineys.

Voting Labour because you oppose privatisation is like drinking vodka instead of whiskey because you don't want to get drunk. We oppose privatisation by opposing privatisation, directly, not by hoping we've elected a committee that would never do that to us, no matter how much pressure is put on them from elsewhere.

If we look at the anti-war movement, it's clear that a series of vast marches did not outweigh the red hand of American foreign policy. The moral force of the marches was more than trumped by the immoral demands of US hawks. However, it did serve as a shot across the bows, as it were, and the plan to Iraq Iran was put on hold. The line was drawn at those horrors, but no further.

Let's look at the golden age of Labour. The 1945 government. That's the one everyone talks about because none of the Labour governments before or after it came anywhere near its achievements.

Sweeping away the detritus of the past, it instituted the NHS, nationalised the mines, brought the country into the twentieth century in a whole swath of areas. There are two things to bear in mind as we polish their halos. First, the people were not going back to the thirties. Those who'd fought, in particular, expected their sacrifices to mean something real. Woe betide anyone who had tried to keep going as we had before.

Ironically the war economy and even conscription showed that collective control over key industries and services was not only possible - it was better.

All the post-war governments, Tory and Labour, were pro-NHS because it was in the DNA of the nation. The people would not have tolerated attacks on it. Even Thatcher didn't try to alter its principles; it's only when Blair got in that we

started seeing real swathes of the NHS put into private hands.

When we stop looking at Britain through this parochial lens, we realise that the whole of Western Europe, more or less, became social democratic. Socialised health care became the norm. The details may have differed, but Britain was very much part of a trend because the world was changing. The kindly face of Atlee fitted the new mood, and he did his best to live up to the occasion, but he'd been pushed to the front and knew what we required of him. The motor was the millions who'd fought for a better world.

Sadly, the hunger for a better world at home never extended further afield. The same government that wanted to raise millions from the horror of poverty at home had its boot on the poorest's necks abroad. Britain even instituted its first and only peacetime conscription to supply troops to pacify the colonies. I won't rehearse these crimes here, but this was mass murder, torture and theft.

These good men were good when we forced them to be good, and they were sinners when there were no social forces keeping them in line.

The government is what we make it in an active, ongoing process. We can't just purchase a Labour government in the shop and think it's going to get all our chores done for us; the bin won't take itself out.

BUILD COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE

Let's face it, they are only the government. It's not like they're in charge. They are a committee for organising the shared interests of the blood-sucking parasites who own everything. They might regulate how much blood gets sucked, how deep they can dig their foul proboscis, and

whose veins are open to plunder, but that's as far as it goes.

The bad news is they're getting pushed around all the time, so much of what governments do is done because they feel they have no other options. The good news is that we can push them around too!

Political parties, at best, are tools to help us get what we want. They are not the thing in themselves, and at worst they are millstones around our necks as we blur the line between their interests and our own.

At every moment, governments are pressed from all sides. I'm not really referring to groovy people writing letters to the Guardian about getting a nicer world here. I mean the IMF. Rooms chock full of bankers hefting bags of coins. Men in uniform making plans about which streets they're going to drive their tanks up. And people not paying their Poll Tax, kids dropping out of school, workers losing their homes and unions, and rioters, and campaigners, and people blocking detention vans, or physically preventing deportation flights, and street mimes, no, hold on, not street mimes. Make your own list, or I'll be here all day.

I'm not saying it makes no difference whether our dear leader is a man of the people or a man who eats people; what I am saying is that the thing that determines who is on the menu is how salty we get, not their moral character.

The task is to build those communities of resistance. They are everything. We need them when cool people are in charge to help them keep their mojo, and we definitely need them if the government is full of naughty boys and girls who need a good spanking.

Whether local campaigns, women's centres, allotment associations or your street whatsapp group, whatever space people come together and actually talk, person to person, can become a focal point for change. No matter how sloppy, regardless of whether it's made up of imperfect human beings or pristine angels, grubby soil is where you plant the seeds.

Wherever you are best placed to do this work is the best place to work.

WHO IS THIS "WE" YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?

"Hold your horses though", you say, "I'm a member of the Labour Party. You keep seeing "they" but for me it's "we". There's no "they" about it."

Look, I'm a member of the Basil Brush fan club, it doesn't make me a fox. I donate to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, no one calls me when a ship goes down.

If you're a member of Labour (or any other political party) I'm sure you can give it a push here and there - in a very similar way to the way you can push it from the outside. But, crucially, it is pushing you too. Putting you in compromising positions, corroding you from the inside and influencing your thinking. You can have a foot in both camps, but as those camps get further and further apart it gets more painful to do the splits.

It's probably better than doing nothing, if those are the alternatives, but only if what you're doing isn't getting in everyone else's way as they try to make a better world.

We have recent experience of this. We had a period when certain leftists, in a wave of optimism, flocked to join Labour. Then, for instance, the leader would come out with very pro-police statements at the very time street movements were raising slogans around "defunding" or even abolishing the police. These leftists were left either looking at their shoes or joining the chorus for greater police funding. Few kept themselves intact.

As part of the anti-Green agenda you had very silly articles written about how you could only fight for

the environment if you were a member of the Labour Party, not so subtly arguing that environmentalists everywhere should shut up and just concentrate on votes; subsuming themselves into a project that the authors themselves soon abandoned. As part of this trend, one well-known left tweeter even went to the online mattresses over the idea that climate change wouldn't actually mean human extinction. It was comforting to know that there would be some survivors. Just like the Titanic.

Imagine if these people had focused on the issues themselves, popularising them, educating on them, bringing them onto everyone's agenda rather than turning those issues into tools to further the interests of their party; to be dropped, changed or picked up, all according to the party's needs.

Union bureaucracies have long been venues for continuing Labour's internal battles, exerting their influence by donating large sums of money and doing everything that's asked of them with barely a complaint. Tens of thousands of well-meaning, good people have found themselves drawn into a world of committee meetings, caucuses and policy processes, the majority of which are ignored by incoming governments anyway.

For these good people, those mechanisms become the world itself. That's a high price to pay for a seat at someone else's table, so let's leave the committees to their fun.

I will concede though that I am being sloppy. Deliberately so, when I talk about "we" and "our agenda" because who am I to say what "our agenda" is at any given moment when we disagree on so much. To be honest, that's why I'm leaving it open because it's up to the people who make up society to set their own priorities and fight for them. And, such is the unfairness of the world, the people who are best placed to win that fight get what they want.

DIG WHERE WE STAND

No one cares if you don't vote, or if you do. The ghosts of assorted anarchists won't come to haunt you if you cast a ballot, nor will the spirits of the Pankhursts come to you raging in the night if you aren't fussed. It's one of the only formal methods of collective decision-making open to us, but it's an occasional ten minutes of your time. Let's not raise our hopes about what voting alone wins us. Your union, tenants association or clandestine enclave of near-do-wells are real, important, and mean something every single day.

Sadly, we live in an atomised age. There's no question that many of us feel

more isolated and less powerful than we ever have. Anything that cuts against that trend, bringing people together in real life, is not just powerful but essential.

The great problem of our age is convincing a detached population that they can make a difference. It is so tempting to leave it to someone else and then feel let down, rather than taking the hard road, responsible for our own fates, and then letting ourselves down. We must not be passive observers of our own destruction - we should actively participate in it!

In general, no one needs convincing that climate change is real and that things are going to get sticky. What most of us need convincing of is that we can do anything about it.

How do we convince people that they have the power to affect events? Through super-articulate articles in hip and cool journals? Sure. OK. You know, yeah, like that. But also... by proving in practice that we can and do have power. Anything so we start looking at our neighbours as part of the effort to make the world a better place rather than someone who might stab us in the night.

My go-to radical on these matters is St. Francis Assisi, who said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words". Don't get me wrong. Words can make a difference. I'm here, aren't I? But it's the doing of the thing that butters parsnips.

After all, if we just sit back and wait for Keir Starmer or whatever helping of mash comes next, then we'll live our lives as root vegetables without even the smallest knob of butter. It's not a perfect system, but it's less imperfect than waiting for the government to grind us into dust.

The bad news is; this is hard, maybe impossible. The good news is; what you do matters. Actually, that might be bad news as well, depending on your anxiety levels.

As the poet said, we must love one another or die. Love is a collective endeavour and an ongoing one. We cannot outsource it, nor should we want to. ●

SEX WORKERS ARE TERRIFIED OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

Marin Scarlett

4th July, y'all

It's on
It is ON

I sent a flurry of texts along this line in the minutes after Rishi Sunak's bizarrely damp announcement that an election was imminent. After all, part of me felt positively giddy. It has been 14 long and miserable years of Tory rule, during which we have borne witness to a relentless and merciless assault on working class people. Off the back of the 2008 financial crash, a decade of austerity stripped public services to the bone, wiped an estimated 2% off the nation's GDP and quite literally shortened the femurs of the UK's poorest children. We entered a new decade only for a coronavirus pandemic to devastate a National Health Service already on its knees, before Brexit and the war in Ukraine joined forces to send food prices and energy bills skyrocketing.

But now, with every poll predicting a historic

defeat, we will finally see the back of a Conservative government. And - like the overwhelming majority of the country, it seems - I want them *gone*. I want to raise a toast when I see the exit poll. I want to dance on the graves of their political leadership.

But as a sex worker, I cannot celebrate the imminent arrival of a Labour government. In fact, it makes me actively afraid for myself and my community. For our prosperity, our health, our safety and our human rights.

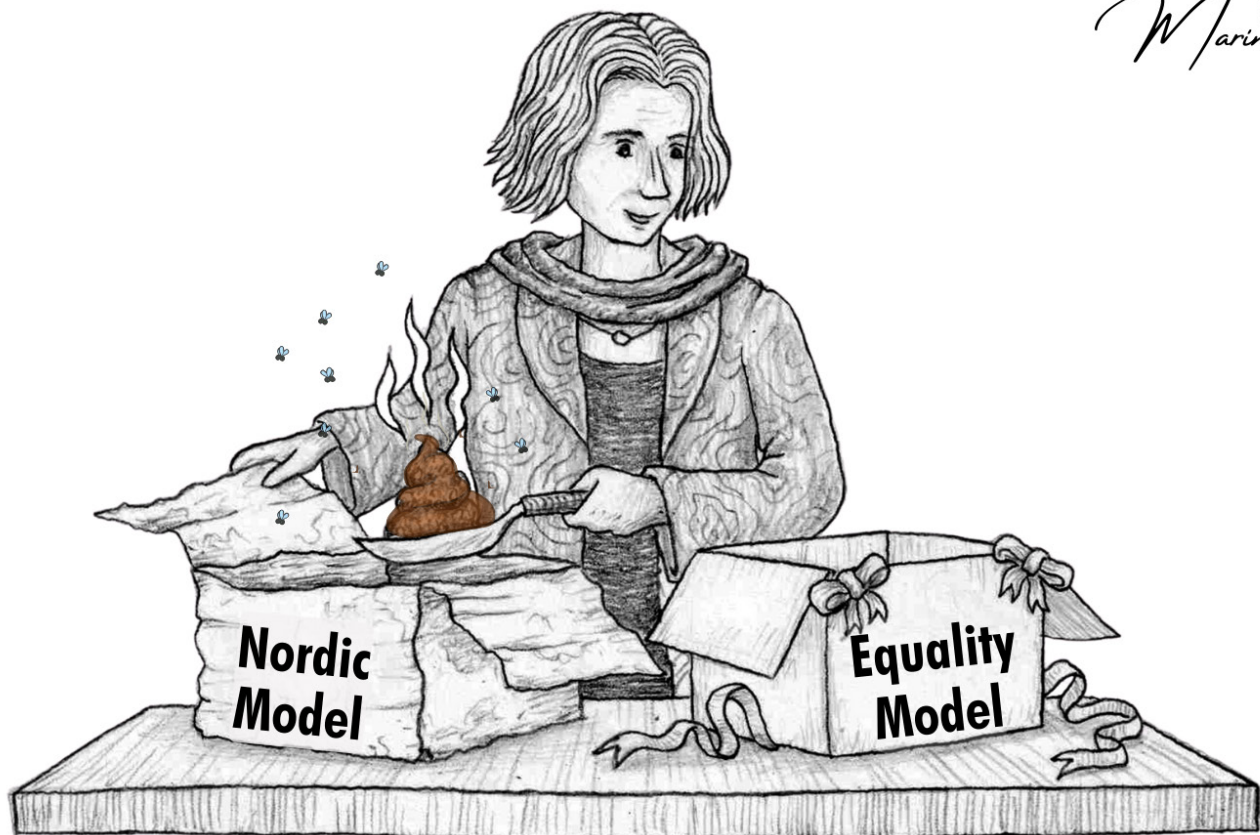
Because this purported "party of the workers" has multiple prominent Nordic model supporters among its ranks.

For those unfamiliar with it, the Nordic model approach to sex work criminalises the clients of sex workers. It falsely claims to decriminalise the worker. In every country that this model has been introduced, sex workers have experienced increases in violence and poverty, and reduced access to healthcare and support services. In the two years after these laws were introduced in Ireland, violent crime against sex workers rose by 92%. In France, there was a spike in murders, while the community reported increased poverty, violence and struggles to enforce condom use. In Norway, a concerted police effort named "Operation Homeless" targeted hundreds of sex workers for eviction in just four years.

As the damning evidence has mounted up, the Nordic model has undergone multiple rebrands to try to dodge criticism. You might hear politicians referring to something called the Swedish model, the Equality model, the Sex Buyer Law or End Demand. To put it crudely, this is very much the same shit packaged in a different box.

I am genuinely terrified of the Nordic model coming to the UK. Since the financial crisis in 2008 and the brutality of the Tory party over the past 14 years, more and more people have been pushed into sex work. Any sex worker in the UK will tell you how saturated the industry is at present and that it is harder and harder to find work. Increasingly, sex workers are forced to accept clients they would otherwise turn away, or offer services that they would rather decline. The introduction of the Nordic model at this point would inflict even greater destitution and risk-taking on people who have already been pushed to the brink.

You might think my concerns are exaggerated and that the likelihood is low. But over their time in opposition, leading figures in the Labour party have signalled their intentions loudly and often. Diana Johnson has made multiple attempts to introduce Nordic model legislation. Jess Phillips has publicly stated her intention to use her time in office to see these laws pass. Sarah Champion has published a blog on LabourList calling for its



Marin Scarlett



— **SOMEONE
HAS TO
SPEAK
FOR
THESE
WOMEN!**

Marin Scarlett

urgent introduction – and notoriously liked a tweet claiming “honest poverty” was preferable to selling sex. Diane Abbott lambasted Durham University for offering support services to students engaged in sex work. Thangam Debbonaire vocally supported a proposed ban on strip clubs in Bristol.

This sorry state of affairs sees me oscillate between rage and despair. How can these politicians continue to push a model which mountains of evidence show increases sex workers’ experience of violence, poverty and poor health? How can they claim solidarity and empathy with the working class when they fixate on criminalising the survival strategies of some of the UK’s poorest people? How can they claim to speak for the voiceless in our industry when they are the ones with their hands over our mouths? How fucking dare they cry crocodile tears over our deaths when they push for the laws that make violence against us so much more likely?

I have dreamed of the Tories’ overthrow for years, but how can I now celebrate it, when their demise means that the people in my life that I love and

want to be safe are more likely to experience violence, to be targeted for eviction, to have to risk condomless sex, and to face deportation?

After an anxious wait, I felt a kernel of relief that Labour’s 2024 manifesto does not explicitly reference sex work or the Nordic Model. However, the very real threat remains from individual members, who are still set to attempt to bring in these laws by making amendments to government bills when they’re going through parliament. In the meantime, I urge everyone to contact their elected representatives to convey your support for the laws that would instead best support our community: full decriminalisation.

Sexworkerrightsorganisationsthroughout the world have been campaigning for full decriminalisation since the 1970s. After this approach was adopted in New Zealand in 2003, sex workers reported improved wellbeing, feeling safer and

higher engagement with healthcare and justice services. Unfortunately, migrant sex workers were excluded; sex worker rights organisations continue to campaign for full decriminalisation that includes migrant workers. Full decriminalisation is supported by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, public health bodies including the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS, and anti-trafficking NGOs like La Strada International and the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women.

I still hold out faint hope that the imminent arrival of a Labour government heralds some improvements for the

working class, and that fewer people will be forced to sell sex to survive. But for those of us that do, it is unconscionable to support laws that we know will devastate our health and safety. I'm an activist, and someone who finds refuge in citing the mountain of studies and the respected NGOs that back up my position. But at the heart of what I'm saying is this: I am fucking terrified of attending my friend's funerals. I am begging anyone who will listen, to not let that happen. ●



**SEX WORKERS MUST WORK ALONE !
THEY CANNOT WORK WITH ANOTHER
PERSON FOR SAFETY, THEY
CANNOT HIRE PRIVATE SECURITY,
THEY CANNOT USE A DRIVER...**



**A SEX WORKER HAS
BEEN MURDERED !
SUCH AN INHERENTLY
DANGEROUS AND
HARMFUL INDUSTRY !**

Marin Scarlett

A STATE IN DENIAL? Why We Resist Institutionalised Violence Together

Josie Ó Súilleabháin

Beyond the burning bin of Parliamentary elections and the cross-party consensus to impose systematic violence on persons with disabilities; a survivor-led and lived experience resistance continues to expose the epistemic injustice of power over health. From welfare to health and law enforcement, a national culture of denial protects this devil's circle of institutionalised violence that can only break if we resist together.

Nimo Younis was only a teenager when she fled Somalia with the support of the Red Cross. Both witness and target of the civil war, she lost both her grandmother and mother before coming to London to make a life for herself. Once she made it to the capital, Nimo spent nights sleeping on the streets before she could build up a network of friends, a few artistic passions and the employment she needed to keep herself alive.

Struggling with the traumatisation of her youth, her friends would say that she would still attempt to transcend her experiences with a “resilience and positivity” that was infectious. Nimo became a personal trainer and helped people keep themselves healthy. If she saw someone sleeping on the street, she would share her food. A “kind” and “generous” person, her friends testify, but by now you can probably tell I refer to her in the past tense.

At the coroner's inquest for Nimo, Coroner Mary Hassell issued a Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD); a document that draws attention to systematic decisions that lead to grave outcomes. In response, the NHS Trust said they would “ensure better, more effective communication” with the Metropolitan Police, who were busy assessing “whether there are areas of learning.”

The denial of responsibility within both NHS and police in the case of Nimo Younis is not an isolated incident, it is the standard response to all accusations of institutionalised harm and neglect. Yet this gaslighting from the complicit is fuelled by the engine of capitalism: individual greed.

SERENITY MONITORING

Sergeant Paul Jennings is a man with an eye for opportunity. In the wake of the economic crash and two years into the new conservative austerity regime, there was an increase in the amount of users of mental health services, as well as the rise in food insecurity and homelessness that made this issue more visible to the public and more exposed to contact with law enforcement.

At this time, Jennings led the Hampshire police ‘Operation Serenity’ that acted as a street triage response team on the Isle of Wight in response to the increase of

those in crisis. He identified that 32% of all of those sectioned more than once under the Mental Health Act were made up of just eight people. This group of 'high intensity users' of the emergency services would be recruited by Jennings in an experiment.

His idea of 'serenity' was embedding police officers into the health system for 'mentoring style discussions' and police participation in therapeutic interventions. Punitive measures included the denial of emergency support and criminal sanction. All of those identified by Jennings were women. All had experienced abuse, neglect and domestic violence, and all were diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).

The police sergeant coerced six of these eight women into participating in the pilot model for what became known across the UK as Serenity Integrated Monitoring (SIM). However, one woman died and a second was sectioned under the Mental Health Act, so Jennings swiftly removed them from his data set. Of the four remaining patients, it appeared none of them had benefited from police participation in crisis response.

Hampshire Police themselves described Jennings' experiment as a "grossly distorted set of statistical outcomes" that was not "remotely accurate" or "ethical" and stopped SIM in 2017. When I asked Hampshire Police about this, a spokesperson responded, "Regrettably, the police data that was used to show the effectiveness of the system in reducing police demand contained some inaccurate data and its use was stopped."

Like I said, Jennings had an eye for opportunity. The police sergeant had already set up a private company called the 'High Intensity Network' that owned and ran SIM, which he aggressively

marketed across the country and received awards for. The police were looking to make cuts and so Jennings fed them the most vulnerable people in the country. This system continues under different names such as FERN, HaRT and PAVE, and under different models such as the surveillance based Oxevision.

The health workers justice charity MEDACT has highlighted that SIM should be considered a form of iatrogenic (medical) harm which risks re-traumatising patients by replicating the dynamics of abuse, according to the report 'Criminalising Distress'. Serenity is not an aberration of the system, the report goes on to say, as punitive and coercive methods of communicating with those in mental health crisis are already institutionalised and ideologically justified by behavioural theory that puts blame on the victim.

SIM focuses primarily on those who experience trauma and reinforces the epistemic injustice of those who already struggle with the 'Personality Disorder' construct, including the controversial diagnosis of BPD.

Dr Jay Watts describes the struggles of patients who experience the diagnosis in her paper 'The Epistemic Injustice of Borderline Personality Disorder'. This group already find their testimonial credibility is devalued by a harmful bias that seeks to individualise problems within the patients' very 'being'.

Subjective perceptions of patients diagnosed with BPD include the idea that they are manipulative or attention seeking, putting in question the credibility of what they say. The diagnosis of BPD itself can deflate testimonial credibility for those experiencing trauma, potentially masking undiagnosed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Autism or Attention Deficit Disorder that continue to have a large psychological impact.

It leads to a silencing, from the clinician and from within the patient, reverberating across social services and resulting in the dismissal of patients with the use of DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) tactics.

"The epistemic harm cannot be stopped – BPD acts as a Hermeneutic seal, meaning that any behaviour

can be explained within its logic, including the rejection of the diagnosis by the patient," writes Dr Watts.

In 2021, NHS England admitted that police involvement in mental health will always be received by many as a "coercive, criminalising and traumatising intervention" and that the use of criminal sanctions or the withholding of services to those in mental distress is a direct contradiction to the understanding of trauma-informed care.

"For this, NHS England is sorry," notes the report co-written by survivor-led Stop SIM Coalition and supported by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and National Police Chiefs Council. Yet this apology can only be seen in the context to what forced this crumb of responsibility from NHSE. It took 60,000 members of the public demanding change through petition, as well as the painful and personally re-traumatising work of survivor-led activism in the Stop SIM Coalition and National Survivor User Network (NSUN).

After fifteen months of working together on a draft policy, the NHSE caved into pressure from Health Innovation Wessex (AHSN), who threatened the government department with legal action. In response, the NHSE refused to publish its own document and denied it ever happened.

The work of Stop SIM Coalition and lived experience researchers like Wren Aves, who uncovered the fate of the six women in the trial for SIM, are those who have not only witnessed institutionalised violence but also experienced the direct consequences of it. The cost of such work led to Stop SIM Coalition being disbanded after publishing the report themselves, to care for their own mental health.

WONDERFUL PEOPLE

Kevin Gale was a self-employed window cleaner but then perhaps we are more than what we do for our pay. Inside of Kevin was a raging storm of anxiety and depression that had consumed his life for several decades as well as a diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. In November 2021, he was sectioned for six weeks at Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust.

Dr Judith Whiteley, an associate specialist psychiatrist with the NHS Trust, testified that Kevin's anxiety was being further triggered from outside, as he contacted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to "at least secure some social welfare benefits." Kevin told staff at the NHS Trust that his main concern had been "the worry that he was being fraudulent in trying to claim benefits" during the process.

Witnesses at the NHS Trust further reported that the DWP was systematically forcing those experiencing mental health crisis into a situation where they are "living on pennies" and "can't afford to feed themselves properly" while appealing the rejection of vital support. Kevin Gale died in March 2022, yet his death is the result of a systematic neglect that his health workers say is a "national issue."

Those working for the DWP reported to the PCS union last December that their employer was a failing organisation in a "state of crisis" that was currently running at 30,000 below the required staffing levels and facing a "near collapse" of its benefit systems, as well as a "deliberate neglect" of vulnerable claimants. In addition, over a third of employees did not even feel safe

handling a safeguard concern, in a survey conducted this year as part of a wider investigation into the DWP.

This investigation was then abandoned this year after the announcement of the election.

As Kevin Gale was sectioned under the Mental Health Act in 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions released this statement, void of reality and in a state of denial;

“We are proud of how the DWP has supported millions of people through the pandemic... it is why we see the DWP as the ‘Department for Wonderful People’. Our overriding mission is quite simple, to improve people’s quality of life and the things that really matter to people, today, everyday – to make someone’s today better than yesterday.”

In the same year, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities confirmed that the British government were found to have committed both ‘grave’ and ‘systematic’ violations on the rights of the disabled

across multiple departments including the DWP. After an investigation into obligations to protect the disabled during a humanitarian crisis (Article 11), it was clear the situation was regressing.

A government spokesperson said in response, “we are grateful for the committee’s work monitoring this vital convention, but strongly reject their conclusions.”

Protecting these departments from accountability is the UK’s human rights mechanism, the EHRC, which for the last five years has failed to investigate the DWP for preventable deaths. For two years, the EHRC was in closed-door negotiations with the DWP to formulate a policy that would protect vulnerable people from institutionalised harm, known now as Section 23, which was then abandoned due to lack of participation from the DWP.

SYSTEMATIC HARM

The historical institutional resistance to protecting vulnerable claimants is a ‘reform’ to welfare that has been lobbied since the 1994 Social Security Act. Regulation 27 or ‘substantial risk’ rules were in place as an attempt to protect children and vulnerable claimants from the systematic harm of power on disability. By removing this safeguarding from social security under the advice of the private insurance company UNUM, the vulnerable were exposed to institutionalised abuse.

UNUM has helped fund ‘disability research’ alongside the DWP at Cardiff University, to support the former DWP Chief Medical Advisor in constructing the ideological basis for privatised disability assessments.

Like the Social Security Act, it was based on the false divide between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor and attempted to create constructs such as common (fake) and serious (real) conditions. Their version of the BPS (Biological-Psychological-Social) model of disability is instead a casual explanation of ‘sickness absence’ and has been exposed as discriminative by peers in disability research since its publication.

In the words of an experience based researcher and writer, Mo Stewart, the result of this ideological

discrimination allowed private companies to “have total immunity from all medical regulation” with no clinical supervision in the assessment of the disabled. This problem is intersectional.

Nimo Younis was detained under the Mental Health Act in the Psychiatric Intensive Care Ward at St. Pancras Hospital, where she made an attempt to commit suicide and was diagnosed with a personality disorder and depression. Despite this, Nimo was then granted unescorted leave by the C+1 NHS Trust.

It was only until 5pm the next day that she was considered a ‘high-risk missing person’ by the Metropolitan Police after a day of discussions with the NHS. By the time a welfare check was done on Nimo it was too late. Her body was discovered in the flat of her friend.

“This cannot simply be dismissed as being a DWP problem,” Mo later wrote to the DHSC in 2020. “The question remains as to who is to be held to account for this identified, ongoing and relentless government generated public health crisis.”

The EHRC has now called the public for evidence, claiming that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has broken the law, but only from 2021 onwards. Those excluded from submitting evidence include lived experience researchers, including myself, and those with first hand knowledge of the benefits system.

Someone with direct knowledge and responsibility for the years of harm towards the disabled and vulnerable is DWP Permanent Secretary Peter Schofield, who said he faced the “challenge” of “understanding the nature of the concerns” brought up by the EHRC. This division of responsibility is key to state sanctioned denial.

Kieran Lewis, Rights and Migration policy officer at the National Survivor User Network (NSUN) said that bureaucratic violence was “insidious” and so must be exposed for both those claiming asylum and for disability.

“We want to break down the traditional separation there has been between disability rights and migrant rights because it is not helpful to anyone.”

Rebecca Yeo from Disabled People Against Cuts adds “When life becomes considered disposable, it’s only a matter of time before that is extended to others... the government is deliberately inciting a culture of fear.”

“When they release films of immigration officers bashing down someone’s door, when they incite hatred towards disabled people, when they use ever greater displays of violence at protesters, the purpose is to make us retreat in individual bubbles of fear.

So, we must do the opposite. We must respond with greater determination and solidarity.” ●

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LONG COVID IN BROKEN BRITAIN

Jon Bigger

‘Do you get that thing with your legs? Mine feel dead sometimes. It’s not an ache, it’s something else.’ I was talking to a woman at the long covid rehab sessions I’d been attending for a few weeks. I’d never heard anyone mention the thing with their legs and thought it was just me. Long covid symptoms can be hard to describe. You really don’t know what it’s like until you have it. Mixing with other long covid patients was a revelation. It was nice to know I wasn’t the only one, but it was also awful to see some of the suffering. The person I was talking to had missed a couple of weeks, and when I got talking to her, it turned out she’d got covid again two weeks into the rehab, so she had to stay home. I know how frustrating the whole thing can be.

Actually, it’s worse than frustrating. It’s a fucking nightmare. I developed long covid with my second

infection of the virus back in Oct 2022. Catching covid again coincided with the Queen dying so the TV was just full of crap. I live alone and so I just maxed out on entertainment subscriptions. I nearly got through the whole of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, when I don’t even bloody like it. That’s the sort of time I was having. Covid passed and I thought I’d get back to normal. But I couldn’t move properly. I’m lucky that I work from home but I had to reduce my work because I got what people call ‘brain fog’. This is another tricky thing to describe but I found it really hard to speak fluently and in detail. This is a problem if you tutor students online. My work is infrequent and dependent on how many people want my teaching. In the run-up to exams, I can end up with too much; the rest of the time, I don’t make enough money to do anything other than pay my rent and my bills. I also stopped being able to write more than a few sentences at a time. I reduced my social media posts. Right: can’t walk far, can’t speak much, can’t think properly, can’t do the bloody housework. Everything was hard.

When I went to the doctors, they wondered if my diabetes was the problem. The results came back that my blood sugars had risen. No shit, Doctor Watson. I’d been sitting on my arse doing nothing for weeks, comfort eating while pondering how handy it was for the writers that the Borg in *Star Trek* don’t actually attack people until they consider them a threat. Of course the blood sugars are high. The anxiety is high; the frustration is high, and the hatred of everything that makes life harder is high. I went back and the doctor gave me an appointment with the social prescriber. I didn’t know what this was. She was nice, but I was hoping for something like a free gym membership to help me get fitter; instead, she suggested local walks organised by the council. I tried to stay calm as I explained that I would only be able to get to the starting

place by walking and I could barely walk to the doctor's surgery in the first place.

I tried to organise my own walking to see if I could get to the stage of being able to join one of the organised ones. On my third visit to the social prescriber, she explained that the funding had been cut and that she wouldn't be carrying on in the role. I went back to the doctor and she didn't even know. This was about five months since I first went to see her. I told her again that I thought I had long covid and that I needed help. This time, she referred me to a long covid clinic at a hospital and now I just needed to wait for tests and rehab. The tests came back OK for things like heart problems and breathing issues. The rehab would begin in November 2023, one year and a month after getting covid.

Unfortunately, I hit rock bottom before the rehab began. I get regular hassle from the estate agent that manages the home I rent. They do an annoying number of inspections, where they tell me the garden isn't kept well enough, amongst other criticisms. I had spent a year doing pretty much nothing, so I thought I'd better make things look a little better for the next inspection. Doing some gardening, and I have to say it was the tiniest amount of effort for no longer than 15 minutes, I knew something was wrong. I felt unbelievably tired. Long covid fatigue isn't simply a feeling of tiredness. It's heavier than that. It's fucking brutal. It left me flat and totally unable to do normal day-to-day activities. And that sent me in a downward spiral mentally as well as physically.

I started to wonder if it mattered that I was still alive. I had the most awful feelings of abandonment. Partly, this is due to hoping that people might check in on me once in a while. Talking to family regularly was great, but very few people ever contacted me to see

how the long covid was going. I'm guessing that people don't know they need to. I felt so alone, and on top of that, I now felt scared to do anything physical in case it sent me flat again. When you're diagnosed with long covid, there is a lot of form filling to record physical and mental symptoms. I was referred to a company contracted to help people with mental health issues in the local area. I asked for counselling but they offered me an online seminar about sleeping patterns. It was two hours long every Monday morning for four weeks. I turned off after half an hour in the first week. They then threatened to remove me from their patient list for not attending the other seminars. The letter included the number of the Samaritans in case I was desperate for help. Then the company relented and told me they would be able to provide me with counselling but I would need to wait. That was eight months ago. Again, they told me to ring the Samaritans if things worsened between my referral and appointment. I'm honestly unsure if I'm still on their waiting list. I have complained a few times to the NHS about this, but they are the company with which my part of the NHS has a contract, so nothing gets done.

Before I could attend rehab I had to do a physical test. There were two cones in the corners of an old ward at the hospital. They were ten metres apart and I needed to walk around them for as long as possible. I walked about five minutes before I got scared and stopped. Then I was told to walk for five minutes the next day but add ten seconds each day. At the rehab sessions, we did a mix of basic workouts and lectures on handling breathlessness and getting a good night's sleep. One woman explained that she was relieved to be able to join as she'd been on the waiting list for over a year. Having not mixed much for about 14 months, I found being with lots of real people odd. They were of every adult age range and a diversity of fitness levels. Every one had their own story of long covid and we all had a range of symptoms. Long covid affects people differently, making it hard to treat. The rehab sessions were clearly based on what they already do for people with heart problems and so they were really trying them out for long covid, with some tweaks to make it more specific for our needs. There were about 30 of us in that rehab group. I live in a small town in England. If everywhere has a long covid rehab

system, then there's a lot of people going through this. Except, not everywhere does have a system of dealing with this. I've seen reports of long covid clinics being closed, so it's a lottery.

The day after my final visit to rehab I went to the hospital for my first proper appointment at the clinic. I could now walk for around 30 minutes a day and the advice was to just carry on. I could get a doctor's referral to the local council-run gym for cheaper workouts and the clinic would ring in six months to see how I'm getting on. It was December 2023 and time for Christmas. I felt much better until New Year, when I got covid for the third time. Someone at the various festive gatherings I went to had had a cold and hadn't tested for covid. Very helpful. Very fucking helpful. Jesus!

Thankfully, being in a better place mentally and physically really helped. This bout of covid was much milder except for the added fun of vertigo about six days in. This was really scary: I woke up from a nap, and when I turned over, the whole room was spinning. I shut my eyes and slowly reopened them but it hadn't changed. I felt sick but I also felt dizzy and disorientated. Could I even move? I desperately needed to because I was going to vomit, a hell of a lot. When that was done, I just slept a while on the bathroom floor. A few hours later, the spinning was still happening, but it had lost some of its ferocity. A week or so later I was back to the fitness levels I had reached through rehab. I started at the gym

and now regularly walk for over an hour. However, in recent times I've found the brain fog is the major problem. When I get physically tired now, it's my brain that suffers. Concentration for long periods seems to leave me physically tired. It's like I need to build up my brain power now my body is fitter. I still have some way to go.

Oh great, another property inspection. The garden has weeds, the flat has cobwebs, there's dust, and the rent is going up. I guess a reply telling them I'm just pleased I didn't kill myself wouldn't make much difference. Jesus, this is fucking tough. If anyone reading this has long covid, keep going. Sometimes it feels like you can't. It feels like everything is against you. The services that might help are not standardised. You will have to fight for recognition. Keep going.

For anyone reading this who knows someone with long covid: just help. ●

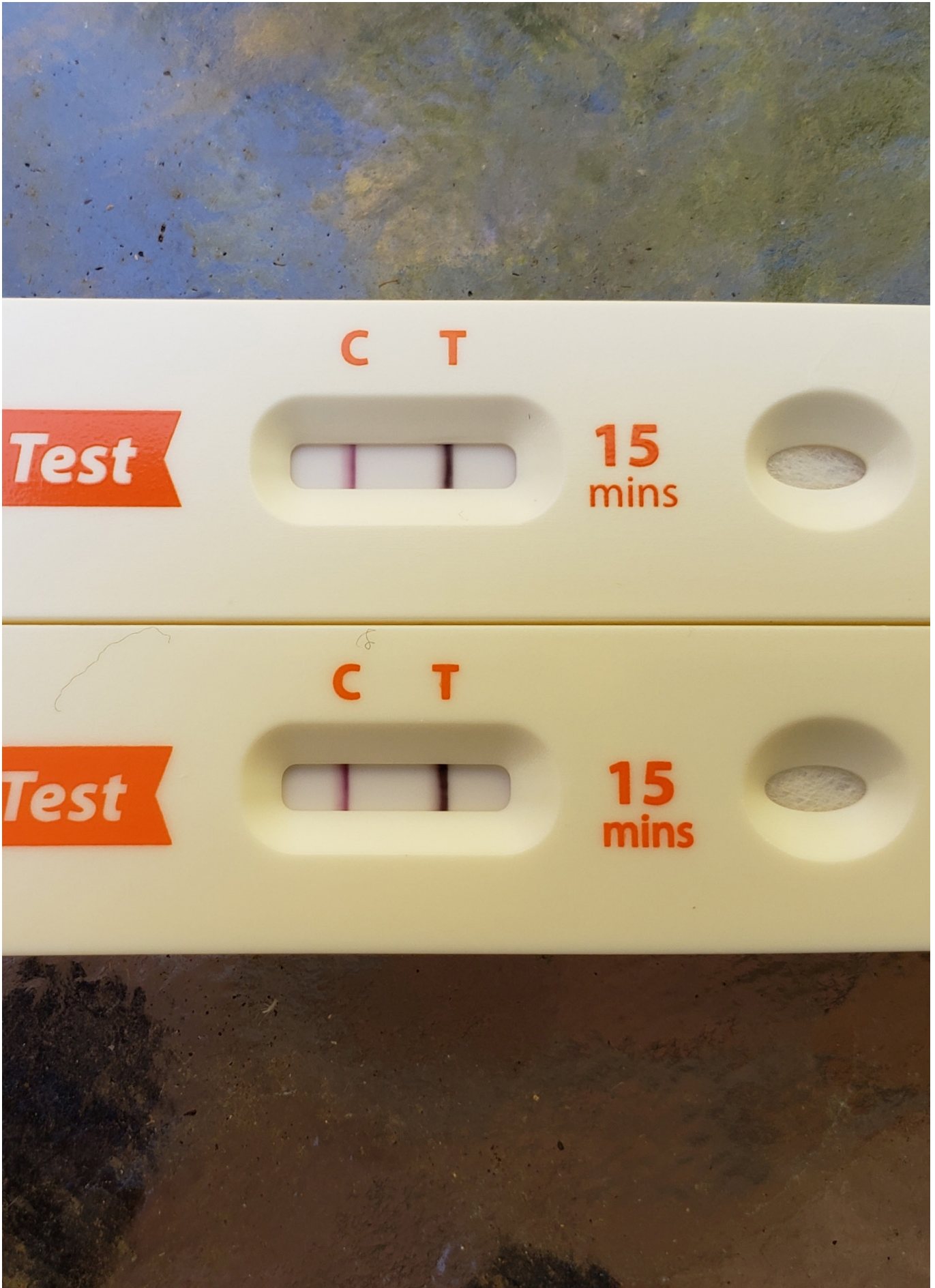


Image: Bryan Alexander

AGAINST MORALISM

Emma River Roberts

“More than anything moralists wish that history should leave them in peace with their petty books, little magazines, subscribers, common sense, and moral copy books. But history does not leave them in peace. It cuffs them now from the left, now from the right.”

Leon Trotsky, Their Morals and Ours

Over the years, I’ve met many middle-class comrades who will always remain dear to me – who’ve helped myself and others, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us as activists. Who listen to and debate us. Who treat working class people as equals. I’ve also met many who’ve refused to help us, who stand in front of us to block us out. Who ignore us and talk over us. Who treat working-class people as lesser.

Think of this piece as a break-up letter to all of the middle-class environmentalists who work against us and demoralise us. The morally righteous. Who refuse to acknowledge working class identities and cultures and who attempt to appropriate our struggles. I’m done. I’ve had enough. I’m not doing this anymore. I’m not playing ball. I’m not listening to you talk shit about my kind. I’m not engaging with you. I’m not coming to your talks. I’m not replying to your emails. I’m not working with you. Take this rant with you on your merry way out and fuck off.

You call us selfish for consuming food that’s wrapped in plastic, ignorant for buying fast fashion and lazy for not scouring charity shops for second-hand clothes. Society once told us it was wrong, and now society’s telling us that it’s right: Why is it that when we bought things second-hand, you laughed at us for not having the money for more expensive items, but when you decided to do it it’s a prestigious marker of your dedication to slow living?

You want working-class people to slow down, but our lives are slower than anything you could imagine. In my early twenties, I couldn’t afford to get the bus and would walk miles each day to work in the rain, snow, and sun. I often came down with colds in the bad weather, and because I couldn’t afford sunscreen, my skin got burnt more times than I can remember. My poor quality shoes had holes in the soles, and my feet would often blister and bleed.

Sometimes my flat would get so cold that I’d keep the oven door open after making food, and eat my dinner sitting on the floor before it to bask in the residual heat. When the nights were getting really cold, instead of eating dinner, I’d spend the money on alcohol to stay warm. Eating more than once

daily was nonviable – I didn't have the money and visiting the foodbank was out of the question. I was too ashamed to ask for help because society taught me that this was all my fault. I wasn't trying hard enough to attain the middle-class life that was expected of me.

But I was trying. I got a job in a new town that paid enough for me to get the train to work. I left home at 6am and returned at 9pm most days. During my time off, I have never turned up at your activist meetings and panel discussions. I never read your books or listened to your podcasts. I never attended your demonstrations and workshops. I was exhausted and lacked the capacity to critique the dire state of this world. I was often in pain from not eating enough and struggled to stay awake at work. I turned to black-market opioids to kill my appetite and keep me awake as it was cheaper than buying food and coffee. The opioids served as a gateway to amphetamine abuse. On two occasions, the drugs almost killed me.

Debts were piling up and homelessness was on the horizon. I tried to do it the way that society tells us to. I really did. But society refused to grant me access to the basic amenities I needed in order to get there; good standards of healthcare, housing, income, affordable bills and food. Was this all that was waiting for me? One day I ran out of steam. I wanted and needed to get out, so I got out the only way I knew how. I sold drugs to make money and **[THE REST HAS BEEN REDACTED]**. When you're about to lose what little you have left, long-term incarceration is worth the risk. If anything, getting locked up would have improved my living standards to a significant degree. It was a win-win situation.

I won it all. Eight years later, I'm writing this from the comfort of my office at home, in between fulfilling my duties as the

Director of the international grassroots organisation that I founded last year and sorting out paperwork for the PhD I'll be starting in September. It hasn't been an easy eight years. I've failed and had to pick myself up more times than I can remember, and I'll never have done it without the support of people I've met along the way. I'll never say that I 'made it' because that suggests my journey is complete. Rather, I'm 'making it', and there's no going back now. I live a simple life these days. When you come from nothing, to want for nothing is to wake up and not worry about your life falling apart. All I desire is the privilege of having the time to think and critique. To find my own kind. To mobilise. To resist.

Working-class people are denied the basic material resources needed to stay afloat with the demands of mainstream life, but we're expected to keep up regardless. We're excluded from your social circles but expected to adhere to your 'hidden rules', which we were never taught and only learned by accidentally breaking. When we broke them, you didn't express empathy, instead you showered us with contempt.

We have to fight tooth and nail just to be in the same rooms as you – rooms that you have the luxury of deciding whether or not to be in. And when we occupy the same spaces, you only see us as second-rate citizens. Our place and purpose isn't to speak and debate you but to exist as statistics about poverty in your acclaimed speeches, or sit quietly in the audience ready to cheer you on. You theorise the conditions of our existence whilst detached from the realities of our livelihoods, detaching yourself even further from our world through your use of jargon that's incomprehensible to us. You tell us who and what we are without ever consulting our kind or asking for our permission to misrepresent our cultures, identities and lived experiences. You never ask because you know that we'd say no.

You never ask us to share our experiences about how we got here and how this has impacted our attitudes towards the environment and economy because our experiences aren't 'respectable'. I've just shared some of the most significant moments in my life that shaped my worldviews into what they are today: My attitudes towards the economy, environment, and social relations stem from this.

But these stories don't fit nicely alongside yours – I suppose it would give off the wrong impression to the policymakers, academics and politicians waiting in the wings. People like me need to know our place – we're supposed to be the ones who are saved from our deleterious ways, not the other way around.

You then have the audacity to tell us that we're the same. You quote Karl Marx and say that because you don't own the means of production, that makes you working class too. We're not the same: Your life course has been one of relative comfort, exponential privilege and emancipation, whilst ours has been tarnished by varying degrees of destitution, classism and de-emancipation. You're nothing like us.

Your reduction of humankind to mere labour relations only serves to expose your naïvety about the real world outside of your middle-class bubbles. Yet when we offer to educate you about class differences and our distinct cultures, you refuse to listen. Instead, you opt to tell us falsehoods about who and what we are without bothering to learn a single thing about contemporary working-class history. Your complicit ignorance about our livelihoods and pathetic attempts to appropriate our struggles is the greatest insult that you can bestow upon us.

We see you, and we see right through you.

I was prepared for having to go toe-to-toe against the bourgeoisie in the struggle to build working class power, but I wasn't ready for having to go toe to toe against middle-class environmentalists as well: People who claim to stand in alliance with the world's working class, whilst simultaneously mis-defining us to mis-recognise us as the global North's insidious agents, gleefully participating in the immiseration of the global South via our insatiable appetites for the imperial mode of living. At the same time, you demean our comrades in the global South through your romanticisation, fetishisation and appropriation of their cultures whilst denying them the space to speak for themselves. You love the sound of your collective voices – ours sounds like nails on a chalkboard to you.

You welcomed us into your spaces on the condition that we shower you with the flattery and sycophantism you so desperately crave. You broke our trust when you belittle, demoralise and talk over those who spoke up against classism in environmentalism and challenged you on your class privilege. Rather than confronting uncomfortable truths head-on and having the conversations we've wanted to have for decades about the fragmentation of class relations and what needs to be done to repair them, you gaslight us and tell us that we're being 'divisive'. You claim to want unity amongst the left but you can't be bothered to put in the hard work needed to get us there.

It's funny how the bullying and exclusion always takes place behind closed doors and in rooms where you run the show – how do you think broader groups would react if we took this outside where they could see you for who you really are?

Your moral righteousness preaches that care is a key part of utopia, but you only care to subjugate those who dare to question your visions. You're cruel – what's dangerous is that I'm not quite sure you realise. You lied and told us you were the good guys – what's dangerous is that I'm not quite sure you even care.

I'll never forgive you for the damage that you've done, and I'll do everything in my power to keep my kind away from yours. The pseudo-class politics that you've created is a class struggle in itself – it only exists to keep us under your thumb, and it's only capable of fragmenting class relations as you make our kind feel inferior in every way imaginable. I'll always regret the time I wasted trying to appeal to your goodwill – all of that time I let pass until I finally started standing up for myself and others. You are not good people.

Morality is the greatest paradox for middle-class environmentalists who profess allyship with the world's working class while lacking empathy for the realities of our hardships and the paths our adversaries force us to take. What went so wrong in your lives that you forgot how to treat others with kindness? Was this something you never learnt at all?

You romanticise and fetishise us as abstract pawns in your blueprint for revolutionary change. We want the same things – a sustainable economy that places wellbeing over profitability, a habitable planet for present and future generations, work-life balance, peace, happiness, comfort. But we want to abolish class structures whilst you want to have your cake and eat it: You claim to want a classless society despite never having treated or seen us as equals. You don't want a classless society – you want working class people out of sight and out of mind.

We tell you all of this time and time again but you still won't listen – you've never listened. And if you have no intention of ever listening to us then take your utopianist visions for a word salad-filled pluralistic socio-ecological transformation and shove it all right up your arse. Sideways. Build your own struggle elsewhere and leave us alone. We'll get on just fine creating the messy, imperfect and joyful nowtopias with our middle class comrades – the cross-class nowtopias you only know how to write about from the comfort of your desks. ●

THE CLASS DREAM

Harley Summers

Coming to Cambridge can be described as a dream and a nightmare; a dichotomy that is probably not hard to imagine. Not merely because of the rigorous discipline that it demands academically, but also the mental stability it necessitates. A plaguing deterrent on my mind before applying to Cambridge was how fantastical it seemed to see myself here in the first place – this place isn't meant for someone like me: a working-class kid from a town labelled by the UK government as one of 'high deprivation and very low progression'. Attending one of the so-called top universities in the world was something only achievable for the privileged toffs of society, or at the very least a rare success story of a feeble kid in a heartfelt hollywood film. Though somehow, I found myself surrounded by a warm community of people, to whom I am forever grateful and indebted, who believed something in

me which I did not share myself – that I too could be that success story. In the end, the only reason I ended up biting the bullet was because I made an unserious pact with my classmate to apply if he did the same because I couldn't stand the idea that someone as smart as he was would miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime, and his dream, just because he didn't want to go alone. Even when I got an offer, I felt nothing but indifference to my own fair deal because I was so stubbornly fixated on the belief that this could never be a reality for someone like me. However it took a moment for me to realise how hypocritical I was being; in my own refusal to see myself worthy of going to Cambridge, I was participating in self-exclusionary behaviours so typically written into the working-class trope among sociologist's research in education. I detested the idea of being too predictable like that and jumped at the offer in spite of the odds. Still, I would be lying if I said that my fears and anxieties which for so long prevented me from saying yes were at all ill-founded.

In May 2022, I visited the West End in London to watch the best piece of theatre to ever grace its stage. *Prima Facie*, starring Jodie Comer, quite literally changed my life. Written by Susie Miller, the play featured the story of a working-class girl who attended law school at the University of Cambridge and excelled as the top barrister of her league. Relating to her humble origins and passion for the law, I suddenly felt compelled to put aside everything I was previously terrified of and follow in her footsteps. Naive as it was, I believed that if she can do it, so can I. It escaped me, then, that she too was a fictional character and I had deluded myself with a dream. To say that being a lawyer is hard almost risks being entirely redundant because it is so unthinkably obvious. Throw a bit of class inequality into the mix, and the task becomes ever more difficult. My first ever taste of



Image: Author's Own

Cambridge highlighted that quite quickly when I sat in my preliminary law supervision and humiliatingly admitted to my supervisor that I struggled to answer her question because the material was frustratingly hard to read. With empathy she said, that's okay, but can't you see the problem that you've identified here, the fanciful legal jargon used by lawyers is exclusionary, and this is a huge issue when regarding access to justice... and yet here I was, trying to be a lawyer and failing at the first hurdle because I can't read the law. I felt completely useless, and that debilitating feeling hasn't shifted with time. My first year as an undergraduate reading law was so confidence-shattering that I considered dropping out pretty early on, but I refused to form part of the statistics of disadvantaged students that made a premature exit from the University. A stubbornness that I want to say is borne of working-class pride, and of which I am extremely fond.

A contentious point of law which I find equally difficult to understand, though not at all credited to any complicated semantics, is why on earth social class is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. For it is indubitably a ground upon which many working-class and poor people are victims of discrimination. I've spent a lot of time racking my brain attempting to figure out a compelling reason why – could it be that, unlike most others enlisted under the Act, is it a changeable feature? Surely not, as whilst we supposedly live in a meritocratic society, the capitalist system for which that ideal is premised still facilitates painfully slow rates of social mobility. Moreover, many other characteristics named in the Act are impermanent. I don't have the answer, but I cannot be the only one asking the question.

Perhaps it comes as no surprise to anyone reading this that classism is still rife in the University despite its calls to greater inclusivity and countless outreach efforts to engage underrepresented student demographics. Even so, I expected most of the ignorance to be precipitated from my posher peers, but that is not always the case. In fact a lot of the examples of classist interactions that students tell of are actually directed from academics, supervisors and alumni. From their disparaging comments to their microaggressive interactions (which usually takes the form of mocking students' accents), their

generational ignorance stinks. Though students alike are no better. Being told that I “sound like a chimney sweeper”, albeit in humour, was not that funny. Nor was the conflation of my use of causal slang to a class caricature of a “grammar school boy who just discovered drill”. There's no justification for that sort of derogatory illustration which only contributes to a further narrative of class students being unwelcome in the University's environment unless they sound or act a certain way that is considered ‘proper’ (in other words, more palatable for the entitled toffs that have to listen to us). Such undermining drove me to run for the role of Class Act Officer on my College's junior student committee, feeling that there ought to be someone advocating against these classist blights. As empowering as it may be to represent my working-class peers in this place, I often feel like a hypocrite whereby I am meant to embody an example of class success despite the

struggle all whilst straddling my own case of impostor syndrome, not in the least helped by the projections of my peers who believe the same as I do, that I am a sort of unintelligent jester who doesn't belong here.

That conflict with oneself is common to a lot of class students in Cambridge. A paradox where we want to perform well, but will never match the pedigree of our Eton-bred peers. Or the boundless career-furthering opportunities, but not knowing how to network effectively and needing to forfeit internships to work over the vacations in order to pay our rent the next term. Not to mention the concerns voiced by family and friends telling us not to change once we come to Cambridge, yet wanting to fit in with our middle-class peers at Cambridge, and some of them even encouraging that we do so in order to progress beyond our humble beginnings. It's the sort of battle that breaks us, and it's so self-indulgent.

The onus is on us in the end to stay true to ourselves and deflect what others think or say. Personally, I find myself favouring the former sentiment – that I shouldn't have to redefine myself. Fortunate as I am to be in this position, soon to be graduating with a bachelors in law at the best university in the world and hopefully going on to a blossoming career as a barrister, I wholeheartedly reject the idea that such succession should accompany some political amnesia of what I learned growing up as a working-class person. Those lessons are just as important to me as anything I've learned about criminal law over the years. The sooner I learn to accept that I deserve to be here, the better. To any young working-class kids reading this who are dreaming of making it to Cambridge or Oxford, or Durham or Harvard – you belong here. Class students deserve the academic success of any other student, and whilst the environment is still not perfect, there is someone like me fighting your corner, and we are all the better for it. ●

The Prima Facie theatre play

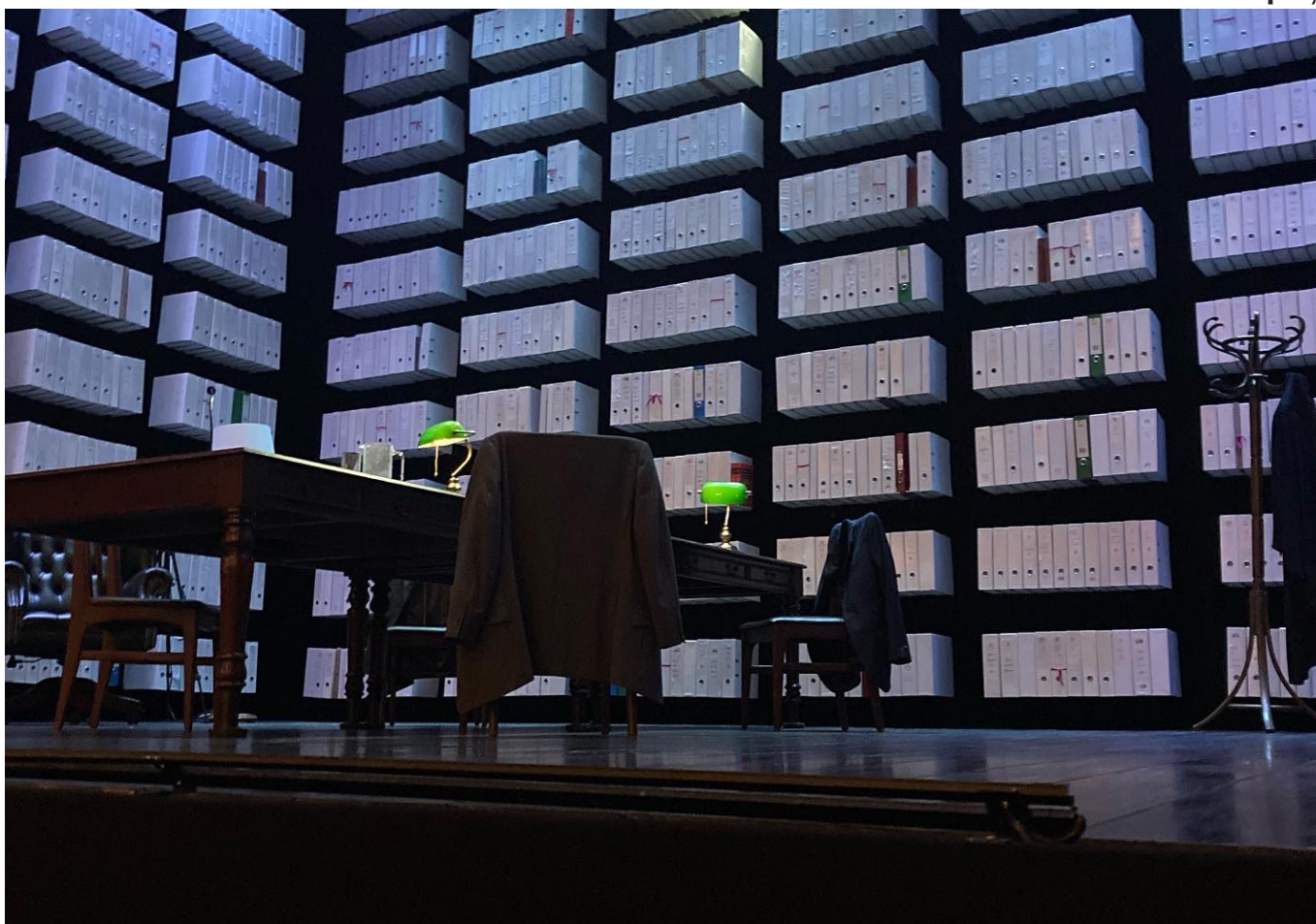


Image: Author's Own

THE BLACK COUNTRY IS BURNING

Joe Moreton

You may recall seeing on the news last year the fire that gutted the Crooked House Pub in Himley, famous as 'Britain's wonkiest pub', and its subsequent demolition two days later.

You may be less aware of the series of other local landmarks that have been damaged or destroyed recently throughout the Black Country and its surroundings. The Victoria Suite in Smethwick, the Hippodrome in Dudley, the Greyhound pub and the School of Art in Bilston to name but a few. The brazen circumstances under which some of these landmarks have been lost has ignited a flame amongst local people who are tired of being submitted to constant cultural vandalism. You may well be aware, dear reader, of the general decline of the British Pub, formerly the bedrock of working-class culture. Though not quite as critical to everyday survival as



Artwork: Zoë Moreton



health services or social care, pubs serve as a litmus test for the health of a community, and the outlook isn't good. Many pubs have already been lost not due to arson attacks or bulldozers but simply due to the bleak economic situation of Neoliberal Britain. Decades of austerity and industrial collapse have left our communities poorer, more isolated and more pessimistic, and the steady disappearance of local pubs is one of many stark reminders of how fragmented and atomized our society is becoming.

It is possible that you may have encountered the small amount of people that respond to this phenomenon with "so what?", or the occasionally heard cutthroat mantra of "use it or lose it". This line of thinking presupposes that the only things worth saving are those that are popular and by extension, profitable. To this I reply with a line that I recall from the Facebook group dedicated to saving the Crooked House, and I regret that I can't remember the person's name, but they said something to the effect of "I've never been inside Westminster Abbey, but I'd be a bit bloody annoyed if someone burnt it down in the middle of the night". Of course, the likelihood of Westminster Abbey being torched and then turned into flats is rather slim, but I'm afraid the same can't be said for many local landmarks in the midlands.

In 2022, the city of Wolverhampton, one of four Black Country Boroughs, was named in government data as the 'unhappiest place to live' in the West Midlands, and amongst the five unhappiest places in England and Wales. The Birmingham Mail reported this alongside a fitting image of graffiti in Queens' Square simply stating "No Future, No Hope." Local news items of late include the trial of two 12 year olds who hacked a man to death with a machete last year, and a mass arson attack in Bilston High Street. This is the same Wolverhampton that hosts the government's 'Department for Levelling Up', located in a shiny new office building just next door to the Lighthouse cinema (which closed down in 2022 due to financial troubles).

The situation is, frankly, far more severe than just having some pubs burnt down. The Black Country may be its own beast but it lives in the same stables as the rest of the country; skyrocketing poverty levels, a massive housing crisis, major knife crime problems, we feel them here just as they are felt elsewhere. We really are in serious trouble. The fact that some people

use the fragmented state of our society to rob us of our local history stings, but it doesn't sting nearly as much as what austerity and capitalism are doing to our people. People aren't in a position to think about local history if they're living in a tent in the underpass next to the Molineux, or begging for change on the side of a busy A-road to buy a hot meal.

Despite the dire situation facing our communities, the Black Country up to this point has continued to elect Tory Politicians. In the Local elections of May this year, the Conservatives retained control of both Walsall and Dudley Councils, and 10 out of 13 Black Country MPs are, for the time being, Conservatives. Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton regularly feature near the top of lists of most deprived areas in Britain. This contradiction needs to be understood if we are to build a working-class movement that can stave off zombie capitalism and tackle the challenges facing our communities. The reasons for the Tories' apparent popularity here are largely the same as those that spelt the demise of the 'Red wall' of Northern Labour Party strongholds in 2019. Working class people feel abandoned by decades of austerity, disillusioned with the Westminster system that offers them little real choice, and angry at the decline of their communities. The Conservatives have been sweeping up disaffected voters with promises to 'take back control', but if opinion polls for the upcoming general election are to be believed their luck may soon run out. A rejigged Neoliberal Labour Party however may not enjoy popularity for long, especially if their victory is based on a low Tory voter turnout rather than any sort of enthusiasm for their watered-down programme. Both the Tories and the Labour Party will likely continue to lose support and trust from communities that feel abandoned, and the lack of action over the destruction of local heritage will remain fresh in the minds of the people of the Black Country.

When the Crooked House caught fire a campaign group was quickly established, first to save the building, and then to demand the building be rebuilt brick by brick after it was illegally demolished. This campaign is ongoing, and the owners of the land have indeed been ordered by the council to rebuild it. The tireless work of the campaigners who have refused to give up on the building despite it now consisting of little more than a pile of bricks deserves immense recognition and

thanks. In Dudley last year, the Council was forced to backtrack on plans to make massive cuts to library services, including the closures of several libraries. Library workers, library users, and many other members of the public came together to resist, and won. It is a refreshing sight to see a spirit of defiance uniting people who refuse to roll over and allow their heritage to be bulldozed in the name of profit. The Crooked House however is far from the only local landmark under threat. If you visit the Black Country Museum in Dudley you may stop for a drink in the Elephant & Castle, a former Wolverhampton pub which was destroyed overnight in 2001 in a similar fashion to the Crooked House, but has since been rebuilt at the museum. It is clear that this sort of thing has been going on for some time, and there are a litany of other landmarks that remain under threat.

The question I would like to pose is this: with the background of our local history being sacrificed on the altar of profit, can we trust establishment politicians to offer a solution? Can we trust a West Midlands Mayor to be the champion of local history, or will such concerns be relegated? Can we trust local MPs to do something about arson attacks or cultural institutions being gutted by energy companies, or will they continue to blame all of our problems on small boats? And ultimately, can we trust our ruling classes to provide any kind of hope or future to our battered, depressed communities? The same ruling classes that have gutted our NHS, who are constantly looking for ways to squeeze every inch of profit out of us, whether they have to drag the sick and disabled off to work or not, and who have the nerve to tell us that we're all in it together when a pandemic is killing us off? You won't be surprised to hear that I think the answer is no. If we want to do something about the wholesale destruction and selling off of our communities, we have to do it ourselves, lest we find ourselves doomed to live in an apocalyptic landscape of empty shops

and empty houses that we can't possibly afford. Pubs, Cinemas and Libraries may not feature in the grand waltzes of power, but they matter to ordinary people, and if we as opponents of Capitalism are indifferent to their demise then we may find ourselves out of touch with the very people who we want to help.

40-odd years of Neoliberal propaganda have told us that there is no such thing as society, but the shared anger of people enraged by the destruction of their local history suggests otherwise. People are also angry at the destruction of their fellow human beings through poverty and oppression. If the two can be seen as part of a larger question of how our society is run, and people understand that collectively they have the power to do something about it, then the ruling classes may have cause to tremble at the spark that could be ignited. I think there was a fuzzy guy who used to hang around in pubs a lot who once said something like that... ●

Wolverhampton History and Heritage Society- The Elephant and Castle
<http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/lost/elephant/elephant.htm>

Birmingham Mail Report on Wolverhampton <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/visited-unhappiest-place-west-midlands-25650255>

ONS Happiness Statistics
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/measuringnationalwellbeing/april2022tomarch2023>

Express & Star Crooked House Report
<https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/staffordshire/south-staffordshire/2024/02/03/the-crooked-house-where-things-stand-six-months-since-destruction-of-britains-wonkiest-pub/>

BBC Crooked House Report
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RISING ABOVE CYNICISM

Reclaiming Solidarity in a Capitalist World

Robert Căzăcuțu

Try having a discussion with any working person of my age today about solidarity, community spirit, or mutual aid and you're bound to be up against fierce mockery and open resistance. It's not that concepts that suggest a different model of living are alien or deemed too progressive for a generation fed on McDonalds and raised on MTV. The vogue right now is taking for granted the belief that acting unselfishly towards others is unrealistic: a dangerous fantasy perpetuated by a detached caste of naïve idealists and the delusional Zoomer generation. This widespread cynical stance is of course that we are all primed to exploit each other. The possibility of creating and maintaining genuine, long-lasting relationships devoid of any self-interest and personal gain is not only necromantic wishful thinking but even a distant, unthinkable dream.

This attitude towards human affairs certainly isn't new, and its reach extends far beyond the living-dead consumer who is chiefly fixated with the market value of things and with extracting pleasure from everything within reach. The familial bond, seemingly the last bastion of resistance against market interests and the forces of supply and

demand, has been virtually eradicated by the all-consuming, all-pervasive zombification of tradition and culture by Capital. The underlying assumption that good deeds must always yield results in the form of monetary rewards at some point in the future have dominated sibling relationships for a while now. It seems we have come to the point where the only way to soothe our conscience that we're doing the right thing, that what we're doing has any value, is by treating everything we do for others as low- or high-yield investments.

It has become commonplace, then, to view and treat solidarity with the plight of another or with oppressed groups with suspicion. The fear that we are being duped into supporting an unworthy cause seems to stem primarily from a deep-seated suspicion that behind the façade is yet another rotten PR stunt. If you profess that you consider becoming more politically active, you are vilified and relegated to the realm of the ever-increasing caste of icily professional social media influencers, whose only aspiration in public life is turning everything into a massive spectacle. In the 'empire of the self'¹ community spirit and mutual aid are merely relics from a bygone era, the evidence you were searching for if you hadn't convinced yourself yet that a socialist political economic framework 'just doesn't work'.

This cynicism and state of absolute abjection has far-reaching political implications for everyone, but it is most acutely felt by those which the current government routinely scapegoats for political gain: asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants. Again, none of this is new. There is a long, exhaustive history of blaming immigrants for our country's problems. As of today, Tory hopes of scraping the bottom of the barrel at the next general election and avoiding the unavoidable has seen the demonization

of vulnerable people fleeing hardship and exploitation², people with disabilities³ and 'hard-left maniacs'⁴.

What is new, in my view, is the way in which we as immigrants, at least in this country, no longer seem interested in adhering to any formal or ad hoc 'immigrant code of honour'. The core ethical values that define us and that a lot of us used to swear by – unity with one another and solidarity with other minority groups and oppressed peoples – have collapsed and consumed by Capital. It is a widely accepted unconscious belief that we are all pitted against each other in a desperate and deadly free-for-all fight for a chance to grasp the 'unnameable Thing'⁵: not a political party that represents our interests in parliament, but merely the freedom afforded to us by Capital to buy more things.

This state of affairs isn't accidental, the act of some unimaginable and unthinkable malign force that operates in the shadows. It also isn't just the result of Capital having seeped into our unconscious⁶, pulling the strings like a spectral, menacing puppet master, influencing us in ways we can't even begin to understand. The result is partly a matter of being lulled into a sense of complacency by the widespread illusion that immigrants who were granted settled status after Brexit aren't at risk and partly of downplaying the mass mobilization of mainstream far-right rhetoric.

The most recent controversies that focus on the surge of 'illegal' immigrants in the UK and Europe – the Rwanda deportation bill, Hungary's anti-NGO laws, Spain's Vox's longstanding anti-foreigner campaign, the Netherlands's aggressive anti-immigration rhetoric and the rapid ascent of the radical right in Italy among others – have once again brought to the surface the ugly truth that immigrants will always be fair game

during periods of political unrest. Immigrants are at the first opportunity blamed by the political right, for everything from the slowing down of the economy and the collapse of the benefits system, to the coronavirus pandemic and the recent pro-Palestine protests. It's high time we understood that we simply can't rely on the government to look after our interests.

If we stopped conflating our struggles, and the serious challenges and often violent discrimination we face, with the accumulation of Capital – the very types of narrative that reinforce suspicion and hatred against immigrants – and restored the values that displacement instilled into us, we will be able to prove to everybody, but most importantly to ourselves, that the pervasive and invisible hand of Capital hasn't flattened everything, and that our political survival and revolutionary potential aren't foregone conclusions. By becoming more politically active in public life, we can demonstrate that integrity and unity are still, and have always been, viable alternatives to the hard-headed cynicism that defines life under capitalism.

This can no longer mean lowering our expectations, or merely adapting ourselves to a hyper-abstract parasitic system that preys on the most vulnerable and spreads the idea that action is futile and that we are alone. A new kind of collective effort, that truly aims to shift the balance of power, must unquestionably involve political organization. But it will never come to fruition unless we slowly begin to wake up from our consumer-induced narcoleptic stupor and emerge as a new political subject with the means and willingness to challenge the status quo. ●

1 Fisher, M., 2009, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zer0 Books., pp. 74.

2-<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/16/asylum-seekers-attacked-uk-violence-knowsley-refugees>

3 -<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/19/sunak-disability-benefit-curbs-sicknote-culture-pip>

4 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/05/suella-braverman-no-time-oust-rishi-sunak-tories-local-elections>

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 5

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 8.

LUCK OF THE IRISH

Niki Hatzidis

I started wearing the ring as a radical act of conformity in opposition to my family. I wouldn't have thought of it that way at 13, but looking back that was exactly what it was. My family didn't clock it either. I just saw all my classmates wearing it, I wanted one, asked my grandmother for it as a Christmas gift and then the rest is history. It's been on my finger for 20 years. I didn't think much about it. Like studs in your ears, I kinda forgot it was there. But I find myself living away from home again. I look down at my hand and think, this ring was one of my first acts of rebellion.

I am the first-generation of my family to be born and raised in the United States. I would say this fact flippantly when asked. "Where's my family from? Oh, I am a pure bred Greek. But really I'm American." I would always emphasize that last part. Since as far back as I can remember, I wanted people to know exactly with which culture I had aligned myself. It was a reflex.

Up until the age of 5, I could have very well been in Greece. My family in Boston was extensive, they themselves only hung out with other Greek people,

and we went to a Greek Orthodox Church. I played with other Greek children and at home we mainly only spoke Greek. Since I spent the day at home with my mother, who she herself didn't speak English at the time, we really were in our own little Greek bubble. Greek music and films rang supreme, and to think everyone was shocked when I started Kindergarten and couldn't communicate. No really, they hadn't thought it would be an issue; the few Disney movies I would watch taught me all the English I needed to communicate with classmates, right?

So this must be where the push back started. I was not only different from all the other kids, I didn't just have weird stuff in my lunch box and faux, ancient Greco decor in my house, I didn't even speak the same language. Now because I was only five and kids are sponges, I caught up on the whole language thing by Thanksgiving, but I don't think I ever

caught up with my peers culturally. My foreign-ness always lingered like a perfume all around me and I hated it. I hated having to translate everything for my mom, going to a strange church, going to Greek School after regular school while everyone else my age was having playdates and going to dance or gymnastic lessons. I was different and everyone knew. I was teased and sometimes shunned and all I ever wanted was to be like everyone else.

Living in Massachusetts, everyone else was Irish Catholic. If they couldn't trace their ancestors back to the Emerald Isle then they were most likely Italian. Blonde, blue eyed children with an affinity for spaghetti bolognese, that was the demographic and I felt as far away from that as possible. I was crushed when I found out I didn't have a drop of Irish blood in me and that a leprechaun wasn't going to leave me treats on St Patrick's Day, even though I dutifully wore green

every year. Even more, I hated that my family did not conform to the American ways I saw around me. Why did they have to be so Greek? Why did we have to go to all the Greek Festivals at our church? Why did we only vacation in Greece? Why did we do every holiday so weird? Why are turkey stuffed with rice and five dishes have feta cheese in it?

Since my childhood I have met other first-generation children all grown up and we just nod, laugh and commiserate at this plight, but at the time I felt so alone. Like an outcast, which sounds dramatic but everything is a so much bigger deal and more important when you're 10 and there are no Americans at your birthday party. I pushed back against my family's culture and values, calling to the roof tops that the only thing Greek about me was my name, my vary complicated, non-western world name. I'd argue with my family a lot.

Towards the end of junior high, there was a trend going around school; a somewhat Irish trend. All the girls in my grade were sporting the same little piece of jewelry. A Claddagh ring. For those who have never come across one, it's a ring made up



of two hands holding a heart with a crown on it. Everyone was wearing it and I wanted one. It was better than a shamrock tattoo.

It even indicated whether you were looking for a boyfriend or not, and I wanted one of those too. I had to have a ring that I could wear with the heart pointing out to let all the 13 year boys that I was open for business. Finally, I will have something that all the pretty girls at school had. I picked one that seemed the most traditional, no fancy stone in the heart or engravings on the side, just silver and crisply cut and all mine. I wore it proudly and everything changed. Just kidding.

I didn't feel much different after the high of a new gift wore off. And I nearly fell over when I left the state and the country and found out that no one really knew what a Claddagh ring was. So using it as a beacon to attract a man was also out the window. I went to live in the UK for a while, my second big rebellion against my family, and had the feeling of being an outlier hit me on the head with a very posh accent. In the UK, no one cared that I had a Greek name, it was the American accent that truly befuddled Them.

At first I enjoyed being a novelty, didn't mind the questions about the red solo cups and being teased for the way I said certain words. But after about two years it got very old. My American-ness was thrown in my face daily and I just wanted to be able to go about my life anonymously just like everybody else. I wanted to order a cup of coffee without having to emphatically insist that I didn't hate Canadians. I didn't want to explain why I was living in London or defend US foreign policy of events that happened when I was 11. I felt lonely again and felt like I didn't have a place I truly belonged. In America I was Greek, in the UK I was American and in Greece I was

just foreign. No one wanted to claim me.

I was young, not very confident and still didn't really understand who I was. Its been nearly 15 years since then. I moved back to the US, to NYC, and had culture shock in my own country which was an odd and also isolating experience. After a quick year during the pandemic in my home town I ended up back in the UK, this time I'm typically not the only American in the room; which is mostly nice. More importantly I have grown to appreciate the things that make me different because each and every 'otherness' that makes up who I am has shaped me in ways I am so grateful for. Dammit mom was right. I'm proud of my roots.

And something really funny happened. The last year I have begun to learn about literary translation. That's right, I'm learning how to translate Greek text to English and really wishing I paid more attention in Greek School. I'm learning to fall in love with some of the culture and traditions I grew up with and finding things I really do love about my Greekness. I like the poetry of its music, its cinema, the blueness of its oceans and the gregarious nature of its people. It's a weird but ongoing process that I am still learning to cope with.

I did attract a boy and made a big show about turning my ring around so that the heart faces inwards. Sorry fellas, I'm taken! The ring has come to mean something a little different to me. Sure I still equate it to my defiant nature, which is pretty Greek, it reminds me of home and childhood and all the things I loved about growing up in Massachusetts. But mostly it reminds me to be kind to myself, to love all the things that make me "me" and also how far I have come from that little girl who so desperately wanted to belong. I look at my Claddagh ring and tell myself, I'm really proud of who she became. ●

KALIEF BROWDER AND THE ECLIPSE OF THE PUBLIC GOOD

Ali Shehzad Zaidi

In June 2015, Kalief Browder, a twenty-two year old Bronx Community College (BCC) student, hung himself in the home of his adoptive mother. His suicide became national news. Arrested five years earlier at age sixteen for allegedly having stolen a backpack, Kalief had been unable to afford a \$3,000 bond. Therefore, he had to spend three years at Riker’s Island, two of which were spent in solitary confinement.

Kalief declined plea bargains that would have required him to plead guilty to a crime that, such as it was, he most likely did not commit given his accuser’s inconsistent testimony. Unable to prove his guilt, prosecutors repeatedly postponed Kalief’s trial. During captivity, Kalief was beaten repeatedly by both gang members and corrections officers, which actions were recorded on prison security footage. Kalief twice attempted suicide in prison.

By his own account, Kalief had no mental health problems prior to incarceration. He would still be alive had New York, at the time of his arrest, not been one of only two states to try sixteen-year-old criminal offenders as adults. The headline of a story

in New York Magazine sums up our collective failure: “How All New Yorkers Killed Kalief Browder”.

In January 2015, several months before Kalief hung himself, New York City banned solitary confinement for prisoners under the age of twenty-one in city jails where, in 2022 alone, nineteen prisoners died in custody. In May 2015, weeks before his death, Kalief wrote a research paper for a BCC English class on the history of solitary confinement in the United States. After Kalief’s death, his professor shared the paper online, an epitaph to a life cut short.

In death, Kalief grew in stature, accomplishing what he could not in life. Two weeks after his suicide, Supreme Court Justice Andrew Kennedy cited his case to condemn the overuse of solitary confinement. A year later, President Obama, during his final year in office, banned solitary confinement for juvenile offenders in federal prisons. In 2019,

thanks in part to public awareness of Kalief's suicide, New York State banned the prosecution of anyone under the age of eighteen as an adult. And in December 2023, the New York City Council, over the opposition of the mayor and the Corrections Department, voted by a veto-proof 39-7 margin to ban the use of solitary confinement in city jails.

When I heard the news of Browder's death in 2015, I recalled what I witnessed during my final semester at BCC. In February 2007, the Curriculum Committee, on which I served, considered the elimination of Sociology 38. This course, titled "Social Advocacy," taught paralegal students how to advocate for invalids, the poor, the homeless, and the elderly, and to help them navigate the regulatory labyrinth of social services in New York City. Every other course in the paralegal studies curriculum did little more than train students to clerk for private law firms.

During the discussion on the proposed elimination, I pointed out to my fellow committee members that Sociology 38 was the only course that prepared our paralegal students to act in the public interest. Such a course, I argued, was needed at a community college where many students were homeless or were undocumented immigrants. I observed that the Bronx was the poorest county in New York State and plagued by endemic crime and corruption.

I might have mentioned that one in three adults in the Bronx suffer from diabetes, or that the borough's HIV infection was skyrocketing. I might have remarked that one-sixth of Bronx's children are afflicted with asthma, the highest incidence in the United States, or that the Bronx's asthma death rate is more than three times than the rest of New York State due to the air pollution generated by the power plants, waste transfer stations,

and transportation hubs that are concentrated in the Bronx.¹ And I might also have noted that New York State had increased prison expenditures by 76% and decreased public university spending by 29% during the preceding decade.²

However, no one appeared interested in what I had to say, so instead of belaboring the matter, I asked my fellow committee members why Sociology 38 was being cut. Thereupon I learned that the course had not been taught in five years. This baffled me, since Sociology 38 was required for BCC's two hundred and thirty four paralegal majors. That alone would guarantee full enrollment in the course. After further questioning, I discovered that paralegal majors were being allowed to substitute "Introduction to Sociology" for "Social Advocacy." That the substitute course had no practical bearing on social advocacy, or for that matter, on paralegal studies, seemed not to trouble my colleagues.

It turned out that the college administration would not hire anyone to teach Sociology 38, thereby terminating the course in all but name. Nonetheless, I pleaded with my colleagues to preserve the course. The proposal to eliminate the course came to a vote in March. I arrived early to that meeting and listened for several minutes to two professors having a conversation about Britney Spears having shaved her head. Before voting, we were asked if anyone had anything more to say. No one did. The motion passed 20-1. As we left the meeting, I expressed my dismay to an assistant professor of political science, knowing that he had to have voted in favor of the motion. He replied, "This is not a room full of people guided by reason." I wondered what had guided him to vote as he did.

Shortly afterwards, I received an invitation to the Bronx Community College Foundation 50th Anniversary Gala which was held the Garden Terrace Room of the New York Botanical Garden on April 26, 2007. The master of ceremonies was Serafin Mariel, the founder of the New York National Bank which in December 2005 had been fined by the US Department of the Treasury for non-compliance with consent orders and for violations of the law.³ Tickets for the gala ranged from \$500 to \$2,500. A presidential table sponsorship could be had for \$25,000. The invitation listed the members of the

BCC Foundation Board of Directors, who included, besides senior BCC administrators, corporate executives such as Howard Stein of Rite Check Financial Services, a cash-checking company whose payday loan services thrive amidst the poverty of the South Bronx.

The stage to what I witnessed at BCC had been set years earlier. In 1991, CUNY students were hit with a triple whammy: a \$92 million reduction in CUNY's budget, a \$400 per student reduction in Tuition Assistance Program grants, and a \$700 tuition increase. Having petitioned their public officials and having exhausted all possibilities to seek remedies from their legislators, students took over buildings at BCC and throughout CUNY.

On April 8, 1991, representatives from a dozen unions met at the New School to pledge their support for the protesters. Two days later, the Representative Assembly of the Newspaper Guild of New York unanimously passed a resolution in support of the student protests against tuition hikes and budget cuts. The resolution called for the News Guild to collect petitions, food, and funds on behalf of the protesters and requested that Mayor David Dinkins, the New York City Police Commissioner, and CUNY officials refrain from using the police against the peaceful student protests.

Two days later, Ramsey Clark, the former US Attorney General, issued an appeal to state and

CUNY officials that concluded: "These students are fighting for their future and the future of the generations to follow. Without education, they have no future. Talk to them. Listen to them." However, the CUNY administration would not listen. Any hope that Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., BCC's first African American president, might forego using force against the students soon dissipated. On April 23, Brown obtained a preliminary injunction – that is to say, before a judge could hear the merits of the case – from the New York State Supreme Court that ordered the BCC student protesters to "[c]ease and desist from occupying, congregating or assembling within any building, office, unit, entrance or exit" at BCC and to end the occupation of buildings by April 24.

Meanwhile, the CUNY-wide protests continued to gather momentum. On April 18, a caravan of fifty Bailey Cab taxis brought student protesters to BCC free of charge in solidarity with their struggle.⁴ In the early morning hours of April 26, police officers massed at Yankee Stadium and proceeded to storm Colston Hall, arresting nineteen students without resistance.⁵ Many students felt betrayed by David Dinkins, New York City's first African American mayor, and

by Democratic governor Mario Cuomo. Disenchantment with the Democratic Party doomed Dinkins' quest for a second term in 1993, as well as Cuomo's campaign for a fourth term in 1994. However, under the administration of the new Republican mayor, Rudy Giuliani, and the new Republican governor, George Pataki, the defunding of CUNY only intensified.

I began teaching as full-time lecturer in Spanish at BCC in January 1999. I had been at the college less than a month when I learned of the death of a newly enrolled BCC student who intended to major in computer science. Amadou Diallo, an undocumented immigrant from Guinea who worked as a street vendor, had been killed by four New York City plainclothes police officers belonging to the notorious Street Crime Unit. Amadou ran into the vestibule of his apartment building when the officers confronted him. Although Amadou was unarmed, the police officers fired forty one shots at him, nineteen of which hit their mark.

The venue of the trial was moved from the Bronx to Albany where the police officers were acquitted of unpremeditated murder, including Kenneth Boss, who had shot

another unarmed African American man two years prior to the shooting of Diallo. In 2016, the New York City Police Department's Sergeant Benevolent Association gave Boss its Sergeant of the Year Award.⁶ With the proceeds of a \$3 million dollar settlement with New York City, Amadou's mother, Kadiatou Diallo created a scholarship foundation in her son's name with the funds to be divided equally between BCC and the Borough of Manhattan Community College. Kadiatou related that Amadou's last words to her, left on her voicemail, were: "Mom, I'm going to college." The foundation now owns the trademark to that phrase. There is, apparently, no limit to what one can monetize in the United States of America.

It was not long before I realized that BCC was a dysfunctional institution that did little to mitigate the societal harm done to its students. In June 2000, the New York City Controller released an audit of the BCC Auxiliary Enterprise Corporation, which receives revenue from the college bookstore, cafeteria, parking permits, and investments. The audit noted that the Auxiliary had made 317 expenditures during the 1999 fiscal year, of which 131 lacked the required documentation indicating their college-related purpose; 32 more lacked invoices or receipts, while 43 others were not properly authorized. Moreover, the audit took issue with the fact that Auxiliary had lavished tens of thousands of dollars on business meetings, dinners and dances, membership dues, the President's holiday party, theater tickets, as well as on items that should have been reimbursed from

other sources.⁷ The audit also determined that the Auxiliary had failed to properly supervise employees who failed to match the number of issued parking permits with the collected fees.⁸

During my eight and a half years at BCC, the administration of President Carolyn Grubbs Williams imposed austerity on the college. In 2001, the administration closed the library on weekends for nearly a year, thereby inconveniencing the many BCC students who work in the daytime and take classes at night. The administration eventually reversed course, but its short-sighted fiscal practices persisted. In the middle of the spring 2002 semester, the administration froze the Modern Languages Department budget, which consisted of a bare two thousand dollars for supplies, mailing, and all other needs, for the entire academic year. It came as a surprise, then, that at a meeting of the BCC Faculty Senate, where I was serving in fall 2002, a college administrator announced that BCC had achieved a million dollar surplus that year.

Injustice is expensive. It cost New York State more than half a million dollars a year to incarcerate Kalief at Riker's and it cost New York City 3.3 million dollars to reach a settlement with his family. And yet New York State continues to undermine its social foundations in ways that are neither cost-effective nor understandable beyond the logic of capitalist imperatives. New York City has delayed plans to close Riker's by 2027 because it has yet to build other jails to house its prisoners.

The BCC campus hosts the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, which was created in 1901, and which is the very first of its kind. In 2017, after a resurgence of white supremacist violence following the election of President Donald Trump, the statues of Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were removed from the Hall of Fame. BCC security handcuffed free-lance journalist J. B. Nicholas when he tried to interview students about the statue removal and charged him with trespassing. The charges were dismissed. Nevertheless, it remained clear that the privatization of public space would be lasting.

Also in 2017, on what would have been Kalief's twenty-fourth birthday, public officials, accompanied by Kalief's family and friends, unveiled "Kalief

Browder Way" on the corner of Prospect Avenue and East 181st Street in the Bronx. Notwithstanding, New York remains the most segregated state for African American students as well as the state with the greatest income inequality. A more fitting tribute to Kalief and Amadou than the renaming of a street corner or a statue in the Hall of Fame would be for New Yorkers to restore justice and to reclaim the common good. ●

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