



LUMPEN

A journal for poor and
working class writers

Issue 006
Winter 2020



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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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*LUM
PEN.*



Editorial

So here we are, six issues just for you. Six sets of content, six ISBNs, six spreadsheets, and a shit ton of ink. Many authors, some regular, some new. Some have never written before in their life, some have tightly held a collection of work to their chests and decided finally to be brave and let us take a peak... You know the story: we're for writers of all calibers, that's our brand.

Before *Lumpen*, none of us were what you'd call seasoned editors—ad hoc experimenters at the most. But for one reason or another, all of us revere the written word for what can be carried, both the process of stringing words together until they make sense to our brain mince, and for what they can do when neatly formatted and printed on the page—which is largely making you think just for a second that 95% of the process of stringing it altogether wasn't just a huge chaos ball. There's a reason why there are infinite magazines with an even bigger infinity of genres and themes (yes that is the correct use of the word infinity). The whole process is this addictive, mind-pummelling thing that keeps you in a tightly bound loop by intermittently rewarding you with nice treats. It's



like using Facebook, if Facebook had spreadsheets. Anyway, here we are being strangely entrusted with other people's thoughts and ideas like we have a clue what we're doing. I'll give us some credit, we've learned some things, six issues in.

If you didn't know, *Lumpen* is the publishing arm of *The Class Work Project*, a co-operative organisation that works with those from what you might consider to be 'working-class' backgrounds. We aren't strict about what that means, because part of our point is that others determine for themselves what class is and what it has done to them—or for them. Part of what *The Class Work Project* does is aid the development of understanding class, and the relative experience of class, and within this, blindspots and the lack of recognition that occurs therein.

● ● ● For example, many of the people reading this magazine have experienced what you could consider 'social mobility', leaving them feeling confused about where they sit in the discrete categories of class. You don't fit. None of us fit. We are all to some extent exceptions that prove the rule. Our stories of 'getting out', 'going to uni', 'leaving our backwaters behind', and 'developing a mildly boring accent' are ways of affirming the idea that your material comfort and your concrete successes are yours alone. Yet, somehow at the back of your mind you know there's an interplay between your own experience of success and the systemic crisis of classed relations. If you didn't, you wouldn't be reading this magazine. It's either that or you're a Fred Perry wearing working-class hero who is in it for the lifestyle (and therefore buying this magazine because you saw the words 'working class'). Sorry mate, our magazine will sorely disappoint you. Or maybe it won't... who can say. Just remember, Solovair always. Never Doctor Martens. Alas, I digress.

Before Covid decided to play with the pallor of Boris Johnson's face and the boundaries of optimism, *The Class Work Project* had been

speeding ahead with regular, immersive, two-day workshops, in which participants deconstructed their classed experiences and considered the impacts of class on contemporary UK social movements. For the last year, for obvious reasons, we've not been able to do this (yes we've tried doing online versions and we're still figuring out the best way... watch this space), and suddenly our broad and spectacular array of ideas had to pare down to what could be coped with on a 15-inch monitor and the internet. Therefore *Lumpen* has been our main source of connecting with you and connecting with your money (jokes). Suddenly, we no longer have funded and paid-for workshops bringing home the veggie baps, we have a magazine. Lucky for us magazines are well known for being financially predictable and successful—it must be true because I read it in the Guardian right before they asked me for money after reading my twenty-third article from their rag this year. To be honest, *The Class Work Project* and its members have been lucky, and even luckier to think of the connections we made before Covid and the connections we've made since.

Throughout the pandemic *Lumpen* not only collated some lovely works into our quarterly issues, but we even started a spin off in the form of a chapbook series. Check out Dorothy Spencer's *See what Life is Like* and Jake Hawkey's *Breeze Block*. To add, D. Hunter, one of our editors, even brought out a second book called *Tracksuits, Traumas and Class Traitors*. It seems not being allowed out is a great way to ensure productivity for some writers.

Focusing our work into the publishing pipeline does have its downsides. I was lying about magazines bringing home the veggie baps—they do not. We are lucky to break even, and because of this, we are constantly walking a tightrope trying not to fall into a lake of profit margins and other capitalist nonsense, nonsense that is actually quite useful for thriving under capitalism. It turns out, running an activisty-cooperative-thing is actually exactly the same as running a business. We have to decide every day whether we

are looking to keep ourselves in business for the sake of keeping ourselves in business (and therefore focus on the profit margin), or work towards a future where our type of work no longer needs to exist. But while that future continues to be a distant imagining, we must remember that the process of resistance is in the everyday decisions that we make. Together as a collective.

Often we found ourselves wondering if we were pushing the quarterly schedule to ensure we would still have money in the bank, and at times I really do think this was the only reason. The pandemic left us (like most) treading water, unable to expand and take risks, so we've done our best to trundle onwards with the one thing we could count on: *Lumpen*. But even if we did want to halt the magazine (for whatever reason), we wouldn't be able to, because people keep submitting their work to us, and we really like that. It's almost as though being stuck indoors unable to meet people hasn't stopped us from being connected to others, and the wider discourse around class across the UK. One might say carrying on about class is a great British passion, whatever the weather. Some also might say that there is a huge tidal rift between popular political discourse and the lived experience of those who are or have been economically marginalised and therefore things like *Lumpen* are necessary, especially in times of acute crisis. I'd say things like *Lumpen* are especially important in times of banality too, because it's when things are normal and uneventful that treacherous power worms its way around our guts and leaves us malnourished and too weak to reach beyond the bare necessities of survival. Not what you need when trying to overthrow a class system.

On that note then, I (and all of us) are extremely grateful to those who've contributed to this work, because it's kept us tied in, given us a political home, and a vehicle through which we can mediate, collaborate, and organise. Even though some of our members can't remember the exact name of our co-operative, and we now

have quite a few different name variations beyond 'The Class Work Project', we are reminded that it's not our name that is important, or our brand, or our collection of witty bants. It's the processing and the development of ideas, it's the potential for human growth, and further, it's the transforming of those ideas along with that growth into action. During 2020, for instance, *The Class Work Project* managed to redistribute £300,000 from those with too much money to those with not enough. This is no small thing, and yet a direct result of the tiniest thing... sticking with it, sticking with the trouble, working on the subject of class with others and the development of the ideas born out of contemporary class analysis. How great is that!

But more impressive than this, all of our thoughts and ideas have finally amassed us with enough fun imagery and word bombs that we've even begun to think about merchandise. Would anyone like a tote bag? Or an ethically sourced T-shirt with 'Lumpen' written on it in bold? No lie, please buy, we need to make some more money.

In this wintery edition, you'll find texts that deal with topics ranging from the microaggressions that keep folk feeling small, to the explosive and conflicting relationship to identity, and the intersections between class, sexuality, gender, and race within that. There's a dedication to someone who is no longer with us from one of our regular writers, and plenty of illustrations inspired by the texts. Our front cover depicts the several millimeters of snow we experienced in February but also the extraordinary potential of the abyss. Here's to the beginning of 2021.

Good luck.

- H.P.

Marie: For All You Were to Us

Luke Ray Campbell and the TCAN Volunteers

24th December th December 2020

Dear reader,

Some of you may have seen an article published back in *Lumpen Issue 3* (A Call for Solidarity: Tollcross Community Action Network and the Covid-19 Outbreak) detailing how we at the Tollcross Community Action Network (TCAN)—a charity based in central Edinburgh—were rapidly and, at times, radically altering our practice in response to the earliest stages of the Covid-19 Corona virus pandemic. Whilst there is much to be said for what's occurred since then and a great deal of thanks owed to many local people, community groups, and businesses for how they've supported our work during this time, right now—on the eve of Christmas 2020—I want to take a moment to acknowledge the sadness and loss our 'service users' (the government term for people accessing the support we offer), our team, and, foremost, the family of one service user are enduring.

I write this just a few hours after our final day at the Community Hub / Food bank Partnership before Christmas. The intimate nature of our practice, and the precise effort to be led by and support our service users as they desire, has often fostered close bonds between many of us. This afternoon, however, right after closing up, we found out that Marie, someone who we'd known for over three years, passed away in her sleep. We, as an organisation, had known and supported her since before I became involved with TCAN, and we'd been with her during most of her journey towards recovery.

'I remember her well with the crime books' —Debs (volunteer)

She and I built a close relationship, and she often talked about how the chance to be met without judgement or the imposition of another person's agenda when she came to the Hub gave her something she's struggled to find elsewhere. This was the point of our space—an open environment, endeavouring to be non-judgemental, and directed precisely by the needs as presented from those in our community. It was, for me, a cathartic and mutually supportive relationship, with both Marie and I speaking to the other about our recoveries and our reliance on antidepressants to get through many of our harsher days. I looked forward to our weekly meetings every bit as much as she did.

'She was so, so lovely. Always so excited to see us'—Charlotte (volunteer)

She was magnificent and I (we) were fortunate to see her grow into the person she wanted to be—her eldest child (now in her mid-twenties) recently moved in with her at a flat close to the Hub, and she was so close to getting her youngest back into her care. She loved her crime novels and read through most of what we had to offer at the Hub's free library (our 'book exchange' formed through donations by the local community)—always bringing back what she'd just finished, and, more often than not, another book she'd read several years prior.

'I remember Marie from the beginning of the lockdown. She had a tough day but when you gave her a coffee and sat down with her, she talked about the books she was reading and she got this beautiful smile on her face!'—Anna (volunteer)

We were so fortunate to have a relationship with her. She'd recently joined our board as she began to find herself 'in a better place', becoming the first service user to do so in our four years as a registered Scottish charity. She was so kind and empathetic, always hesitant to take much of the support we had on offer in

case ‘someone else needed it more’. As a service user, she knew everyone else who attended the Hub every bit as well as we did, and she always asked after our volunteers who, themselves, had to shield back in March 2020 and were thus no longer present at the Hub when she came down. Yet, even with the new faces as others stepped up to support our work, as and when they could, they were rapidly graced with her kindness and attentive manner.

‘She was a good lady. I liked her a lot’—David (long term volunteer and now-Trustee)

I’m so proud of everything she achieved for herself and her family and it was a true privilege to count myself as a friend. She’ll be missed more than she’ll ever know.

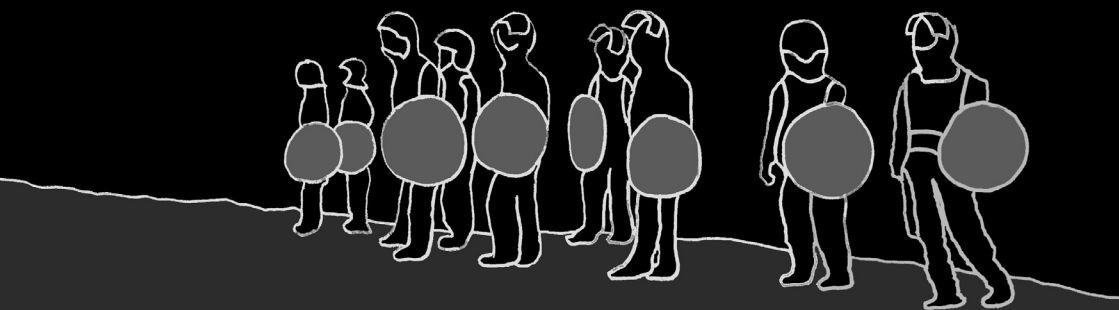
Thank you, Marie. For everything.





Photo credit: Luke Ray Campbell





I have stopped counting on the power of poetry

Sean Cummin

The recruitment agency asked me
*Tell me what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?*

The avatar of sandwich told me
*I have eaten
the fries
that were in
the bucket*

The head of Homeland Security
(after being accosted in a restaurant)
said to me
*You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise*

The CIA, The Federal Reserve, The Army and Navy
all the armed and unarmed men of the state
lining up outside the homes of the poor
Ready to kick in their door
Ready to drag them out into the street
Ready to butcher them with the slightest
peep out of their fucking mouths
They sing to me
*Man to Man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that*

Footnotes

Jay Fraser

He sighed, wiped his hand against his shirt, absently noticed the stain on his hand¹ and shrugged. Surely, he thought, he would remember to wash it off before he had to meet with his manager later that day,² and if he didn't, he was sure that he would keep the hand hidden underneath the desk. Of course, that would defy all forms of professional rules of etiquette, and present him as someone who was unwilling to engage in an open and forward manner with his superior. However, given that he didn't particularly care for his superior – the two already disliked each other as a result of him being found using his spare time to research revolutionary movements in South America rather than working – he didn't much care what his boss thought. If he got fired, then that would be alright, he thought to himself.³

Of course, he thought that but did he believe it? Well, yes, on a certain level, but he found there was often a selfish core to one's desires which came into conflict with the more practical and necessary elements of human life. Of course the desires of the individual must always be subsumed beneath a stale wave of pragmatism. If you make it to the end of your life having satisfied even a minute portion of the innate desire to live and experience the process of living for which you were born, then you were quite lucky indeed and totally unjustified in ever wishing for anything else.⁴ Alexander thought that this was nonsense but at the

- 1 Stanley Green, *Blue Pen*, (Borrowed Items, Break Room, 2018), left index finger.
- 2 James Pressley, *Performance Review*, vol. 5, 2018, Central Office.
- 3 Alexander Melformé, *My Thoughts and Opinions*, (Conscious Thought, Brain, 2018), one of untold millions.
- 4 The Gestalt Conglomeration of United Subconscious Individual Opinion, *The Right Way To Live*, (Capital Imprints, State Manifestations, date

same time lived his entire life as if it were concrete reality, as sure and assured as the grinding of a boot against the grasping fingers of a man in his death throes.⁵ It was unquestionable, in practice.

Alexander stood and, nodding across the gap between his desk and the desk of the lady who worked adjacent to him, he noted the grim smile she gave to him. There was no warmth in it, and yet no animosity. He was sure he had done nothing to irritate her, at least not recently, but she looked as if she was only a few seconds away from upturning her desk and ejecting her computer monitor through the window. And possibly following it herself, if the mood struck.⁶ Maybe it was him, Alexander thought. He pictured the scene briefly although in stark detail: the computer shattering against the unforgiving concrete below, the chips of broken glass finding themselves embedded in the rubber sole of the boot of a passer-by, transported to sit forgotten, with neither grace nor purpose,⁷ in the oft-neglected and matted fabric of the tousled doormat that sat on the porch of the boot's owner. He saw her body crumple onto the glass and spent plastic chips already littering the pavement. He exhaled slightly, in sympathetic pain.

The noise of his own exhalation awoke him to the reality of the situation again. He realised he had spent nearly a minute staring blankly at his colleague, and that she was looking at him slightly oddly. The grim smile had vanished and was replaced by a mixture of concern and wariness. Her eyes contained the warped steel of self-esteem bent and quenched by the oily remarks and gazes of the men whose careers built themselves around her. Those whose labours rested atop her own, who could not function without her, and yet who dismissed and disregarded her. She

unknown.), pgs. 1 - ∞.

- 5 Pain and Suffering, 'The Result of Acting Out', *New Pragmatist Review*, vol. 50, 4000 B.C., p. 1979
- 6 Jessica Harris, *Subliminal Urges*, (Submerged Desires Inc., Brain, 2018), on every page.
- 7 Alexander Melformé, *Self Image 'in Metaphor*, (Trapped and Unknown Thought, Brain, 2018), page unknown.

was irregular, misshapen, and twisted to herself, and yet she contained a strength that Alexander knew he did not. He wished he had that kind of resolve, sometimes.⁸

Walking past the other desks, taking great care to avoid meeting any eyes and therefore to avoid any potential conversation, Alexander walked over to the double doors that lay at the end of the room. He moved through them, the minute weight of the surprisingly light wood catching him off guard once again, and throwing the door open with far greater speed than he had intended. He reached forward and tried to catch it before it slammed into the wall that ran alongside the staircase, but he failed and the sharp crack of wood on plaster rang out anyway. He closed his eyes and cursed to himself under his breath, hoping that nobody had noticed his mistake.⁹ They had, of course, but it made him feel better to hope anyway.

● Descending the winding staircase, taking pains to place his footsteps towards the edges of the steps to avoid the inevitable creaks that would come screaming out at him should he put his weight on the oft-abused middles, he kept his gaze firmly away from the tall windows.¹⁰ They screamed of a form of voyeuristic pleasure, from which those inside could look out and cast judgement upon those who were denied entrance, and also from which those outside could look inwards with pity. Pity, for those tied to the clock and shackled to the monitoring of their lives and labours. After only a short period of walking, Alexander reached the ground floor and took quick strides towards the desk. He smiled at the receptionist, and passed her over his key card. She offered

8 Alexander Melformé, 'The Results of Decontextualised Wishful Thinking Combined With Total Misunderstanding of the Consequences of Labour Environments in Regards to Gender', *Failed Empathetic Responses Press*, vol. 6, p. 2

9 The Human Collective, *Fear of Error*, (Self Published, 200000 B.C.), p. XII of Foreword

10 The City of London, *Uniformity in Skyscraper Architecture*, (Ideological Byproducts, Cultural Consciousness, 1970-2018)

him a polite enquiry¹¹ and he dismissed her. Moments later he would regret it, but upon taking a few steps away he no longer had the courage to turn back and apologise. Had he stalled his momentum now, he would never start again.

Alexander walked out of the great glass building, the scintillating flecks of coloured light that refracted from its monolithic surface dotting the concrete of the ground and bouncing from the surrounding cars and bicycles, blinding him. Even the light was tainted by association, he felt. He put his hands in his pockets, absentmindedly fingering the pen he had forgotten was there. When he was younger he wanted to be a journalist, to expose wrong-doing, discover the world, enlighten people.¹² As he got older, he became disillusioned with the nature of media, and as a grand novelistic venture, had instead gone to work at this giant, impersonal corporation. He spent the day using those words he had learned while seeking to speak against power in order to enact it; and he didn't even use his own pen to do it. In disgust, Alexander fished the pen from his pocket and dropped it onto the ground, and took a step forward to crush it beneath his sole. He tried his absolute best to push down the feeling of guilt that wrapped itself around his spinal column and lurched through his nervous system like a ship through ice.¹³

Loosening his tie, Alexander resolved to never come back. No need to resign, nothing formal, no two-week notice,¹⁴ just a removal of himself from the situation so that he could seek better things. Maybe now he wouldn't project his own wishes onto his colleagues and imagine them throwing themselves out of windows, just so he didn't have to imagine it for himself. Sometimes, when talking to his manager, he felt like grabbing

11 Nadia Erakat, *Professional Courtesy 'in Times of Not Caring*, (Workerist Press, Michigan, 1963), p. 1

12 Alexander Melformé, *Childish Hopes and Dreams*, (Misunderstood Publications, Propaganda, 1995), p. 6

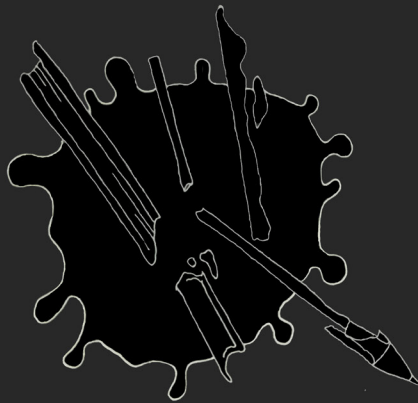
13 Stanley Green, *Blue Pen*, (Borrowed Items, Break Room, 2018), annihilated.

14 Alexander Melformé, *Chronicles of an Impressively Loose Cannon*, (Faux-Liberation Publications, Self-Satisfaction, 2018), p. 34

him in both hands and vaulting them both out of the window, or down the stairs, or into any other kind of potential danger. Would it be worth it to remove just a single emissary of the hand of professional autocracy?¹⁵ Either way, it was no longer his concern. Alexander was going to do something good. He was going to get a better job, elsewhere, or maybe not work at all. Maybe he could look into those revolutionary movements and go find somewhere better to live. A commune maybe, somewhere less luxurious but more human. Somewhere where he could feel like a living being again.

Alexander Melformé took three steps down the stairs, and planted his feet firmly off of the corporate ladder. He looked to his left, and then took a step forward into the road, tie loosened and feeling like he could breathe deeply again for the first time since he had originally imagined being that cutting-edge journalist as a child. He turned his head to look to the right before taking his second step, and was immediately levelled by the speeding, honking grille of an eighteen-wheeler, the tyres screeching with futile protest against the ground, eviscerating him. Soft sounds, drowned beneath the volume of the crash, came from the scattering of the contents of his pockets across the black-top surface and grinding his flesh into the rugged tread of the tires. His blood ran into the cracks, settling in pot-holes and sitting like veins of ruby in the spidered texture of the road. In the distance, someone screamed and another two people looked up from the floor before wincing involuntarily. Behind it all, the glass tower rose like an idol, peering down, and the sun above didn't even see fit to use the building to cast shadow. There hadn't been enough time for a final thought, but if there had, it might have been about how strange it was that real death seemed less of a punishment than the spiritual death in which he had been trapped for so long. The ink from the smashed pen clung to his shoe.

15 Alexander Melformé, *Good Fucking Questions Pt 2*, (Illegalism Press, Rebellious Thoughts, 2018), p. 4





The Economy is Not Like Your Household

Stephanie Kelton's The Deficit Myth

Francis Brewer

For decades in Britain, our political debate has been stifled by the idea that the economy works like a household. Think-tanks, politicians, and most economists spread the idea that the national economy is sufficiently similar to an individual family, that insights which work at the household level will also work at the level of national policy. We all know that if I want a new car, and I don't have savings, I will either have to earn more or borrow more. The household analogy argues that the same holds true for the government. So, if we want to build a new hospital, or library, or fund our schools, then we can either raise taxes or go into debt by borrowing. Since the government is already in an unfathomably large amount of debt, the household analogy claims that we are at risk of going bankrupt if we keep borrowing. The option we are left with, then, is to raise taxes—a deeply unpopular idea. This bind leads to arguing in favour of spending cuts, in order to prevent the country going bust. The consequence of this thinking has been a chronic underfunding of public services in the UK, but what choice do we have? The money simply isn't there.

The recent corona virus cash injection into the economy has shown us that, when the government wants, they can create huge sums of money in very little time. Unprecedented sums have been paid out to the British public during the corona virus pandemic, payments that will likely continue for the foreseeable future—at the time of writing the government has injected over £300bn into the economy. Since taxes have not been raised in this period, the household analogy suggests that the government plodded cap in hand to some unknown lender to beg for the cash. Pundits on both the left and right are now telling us that we are saddling future generations with this debt; our children and grandchildren will be left footing the bill. Big-business-backed think tanks are already emerging from the shadows to recommend another course of corrective austerity and, despite Boris's words to the contrary, the economic orthodoxy described by the household analogy tells us that either taxes must go up, or spending must come down. We must start to call this what it is: a fairytale.

The British government is monetarily sovereign, meaning that it has the right to print its own money and that it does not offer to exchange anything for that money (either gold or another currency). The government is not like your household: the government can't run out of money because they can print as much as they like. I can run out of money and you can run out of money, but that's because we are currency users: we don't have a printing press. Although there are real constraints on how much money can be created and when, as too much money at the wrong time can cause inflation. The government are currency issuers: they have a right to create legal tender, meaning

that they can't run out. This simple fact is near entirely absent from mainstream political discussion. Stephanie Kelton, following a long line of thinkers in Modern Monetary Theory and anthropology, dismantles this world-view in her new book, *The Deficit Myth*.

The model of 'the economy as household' argues that a government needs its people to get money. The people are the creators of money and the government uses taxes to take some of that money for use in government services. When Thatcher said 'The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money', she fundamentally misunderstood how money is created. Thatcher had the relationship backwards: the government doesn't get money from the people, the people get money from the government.

Every pound in your pocket has either been created by the government, or by certain banks that the government has given the right to create money. The government creates the money and distributes it into the economy, and only then does it receive some of that money back in the form of taxes. The government doesn't rely on taxes for money—we rely on the government for the money to pay our taxes. Even if we get our money from work, that money originally came into the economy through either the government or an approved bank. Government spending is not our money being wasted, it is how we get money in the first place.

To make this clearer, it helps to think of the economy as being made up of two buckets: one with the government's money, and the other with our money. If the government puts £100 into our

bucket (the economy), and taxes £30 back, the government is left with a deficit of £70 in their bucket—they end up with £70 less than they started with. For example, the government is currently making direct support payments to people during the pandemic. Some of this money will be taxed back, but most will not, leaving the government with a deficit. This deficit is always portrayed as a bad thing in the media as it means the government has lost money. The problem is that this completely ignores the other side of the equation. The money hasn't disappeared, it is in our bucket. The rest of the economy (us) have received £100 in government spending, but have only been taxed £30. That means that we are in a £70 surplus. The money is sat in our pockets.

- Whenever the government runs a budget deficit, we are running
- a surplus. Deficits are only bad if you conveniently ignore this
- fact. If the government were to start being more 'responsible' by running a surplus (as many people demand) then we, the people, would be in a deficit. The government would be taking more out of our pockets than it puts in, and so we would end up poorer.

But doesn't this deficit spending drive the government into debt? And doesn't that mean our children and grandchildren will be left footing the bill for our reckless spending? Simply put: no. The British government is in debt, but it is a debt owed in pounds and since it can print as many pounds as it would like (today it is more likely to be a digital creation, rather than actually printed) it could pay off the debt tomorrow if it wanted. The past ten years of austerity did nothing to enable

the government to pay off the national debt. They could have paid it off whenever they liked, with little more than a keystroke. For some countries, debt can be a real problem, but only if they are not monetarily sovereign. Greece for example, owed a debt in Euros—a currency that they are not permitted to print. In this case, Greece is like you or I, a currency user not a currency issuer, and as a currency user it is possible for Greece to have a debt it cannot afford to pay. Greece genuinely did have to ask for a debt write-down because they could not print their debt away. This is not the case with our government whose debt is owed in pounds.

Pegging a currency also means that a country is not monetarily sovereign. The UK once pegged the pound to gold, meaning that at a given exchange rate it would convert pounds to gold. This constrains how many pounds can be printed because of the gold needed to back up the currency. The same is true of many countries today who peg their currencies to other currencies, most often the dollar. These countries must hold a reserve of this foreign currency corresponding to the amount of their own currency in circulation. This constrains how much money they can print because they cannot print additional money without increasing their foreign currency reserves. Because the UK can print its own money and does not peg its currency to anything, it is monetarily sovereign and does not face these constraints on money creation.

There are limits on government spending however. Although money is essentially infinite, people and resources are not. We cannot create more houses if there are no people qualified

to build them, or no bricks and mortar to build them from. Whilst there is no money constraint on funding hospitals, if there are not enough doctors we will be unable to staff them, as we are seeing with the Nightingale hospitals now. There are also ecological limits to the amount of carbon we can release into the atmosphere, or water we can use before we create an uninhabitable planet. These are the real constraints.

Too much government spending, or spending at the wrong time can also cause inflation. If the economy is already running at full speed, meaning that we are near full-employment and most or all of our resources are being used, then the government would have to bid higher than the private sector for those resources thus pushing up prices and creating inflation.

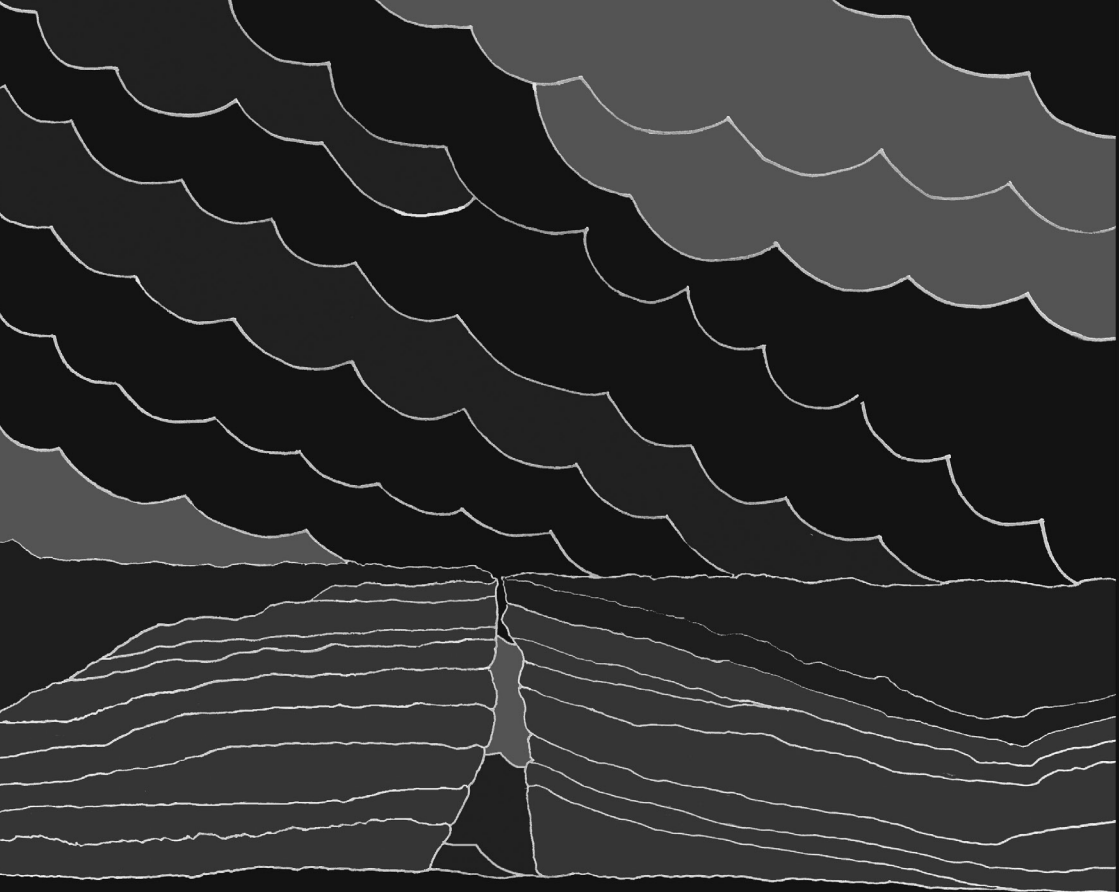
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- Returning to our house example, if all the qualified builders are already working for private construction firms, the government must offer them a higher wage to attract them to building government homes, causing inflation. The same is true if there is a shortage of resources and the government bids up the price.

In our current economy however, we have millions of people unemployed or underemployed, meaning the government could safely increase spending without the risk of inflation. We have seen this with the current coronavirus stimulus package. After what might become the largest government injection of cash in British history we have not seen an increase in inflation. That's because it was the right time to create extra money, as we had lots of people and resources that were not being used.

Once we accept the paradigm-shifting truth that the government cannot run out of money, thus abandoning the idea that the economy is like a household, the self-imposed limits on what governments may do are lifted. We have the ability to imagine fairer and more just societies based around strong public services.

Perhaps the most compelling use for this insight is to create a Green New Deal. In 2018, the IPCC released a report that we have 12 years to drastically restructure our societies to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Failure to do so will result in catastrophic climate change and a likelihood of total social collapse. In the two years since the report our government has failed to take action in line with the scale of the coming disaster. Debates about how to pay for climate action have hampered progress on this issue, but as we have seen, if there is spare capacity in the economy the government can simply print the money. The barriers in the way of taking drastic climate action are not monetary, they are ideological.

Taking action on climate change is just one of the possibilities available to us once we give up the pernicious myth that the economy is like a household. For over ten years, our country has been gutted by government austerity, immiserating millions of British people and preventing us from reaching our national potential. None of this was necessary. Even judged by its own standards, austerity failed to reduce the government debt. It doesn't have to be this way. Modern Monetary Theory gives us the chance for a radical rethinking of what is possible. A fair, just, and equal society need not be a fairytale; the idea that our economy is like a household is.



**Looking
Down
the
Valley
from
Trefil**
Rob King

Tearing the clouds the terrified sun
Streaks over the sky tempestuous burns,
Cars screaming with perverted thrum
Over the valleys where no pit wheel turns

What life may come in these desolate scapes
The unknown more exciting, even if void.
Grey terraces filtered through by faceless apes,
Algorithmic adverts flogging their toys.

The red bracelet glitters and drips even more
Streaking screaming scarlet to finger from wrist.
She shrieks 'La tristesse durera toujours'
All scarlet must dry into brown crusted mist.

Why even retain the desire to stay?
O vanity of vanities—which one is mine?
For death may deliver what life does forsake;
Never to see again with tormented eyes.

As he said, though blighted be these Valleys,
And this endless blight not mine alone,
I'll hang me from one of these pine trees,
For these solemn Valleys are my home.

At the base of the cliff surrounded by grass
Jagged edged beauty inviting the null.
There's plenty of spectacle—although a bit crass—
A quietus crag to split open my skull.

Comin' Up The Auld Mill?

Davey Payne

We first went up the auld mill as bairns.
Well.... not bairns but boys rather than men,
as Burns was when he trod down by Cluden side.

- We were inexorable and intrepid
- yet as obedient as the throbbing, swelling,
- tribal capillary of Cluden Water.

What was it that divined us there? What is it's turgid influence on
the Nith?

Garnered by centuries of faithfulness
we blindly showboated off the rope swing
before the shock of the rapids tickled and froze
us like trout
snuffing out our faux valour as naturally
as the sultry summer slew drove its illicit cargo of feral fauna.

The whispered violence, the flora
and fermented fervour ferried by the wind
over bank, nook and crag
where future old scores were forged with
newfound adversaries faintly recognised from
Beavers, Cubs, inside the enclosure at Palmy.

The Heathers and Hazels blossomed
yet unheeded as both naive and vainglorious
real blows awaited us downstream,
right throughout our short precious time,
the kind of slaps, cracks and thwocks from The Dandy
that we had just.... outgrown.

Some washed out, some floundered,
some spewed out away beyond
even estuary, out to sea.
It was all there in these frolics
up Cluden Water
when we were already all
the men that we would all ever be....

Sir, You Don't Own Me.

Grace Carmen

A couple of years ago I completed both my master's degree in literature and my biggest ever mental breakdown. The immense pressure of attaining a postgraduate degree, reading up to three novels a week, and working twenty hours across two part-time jobs ended up being a little too much for me. Somehow, the most difficult thing about this period of time was my regular interactions with the two people who might, in a Victorian lifetime, be vying for the role as my benefactor.

- I've only really interacted with two truly posh people, the legitimate
- upper class, and that's my landlord and my employer from this
- period. My landlord was an old, eccentric white man born in India during the British Raj. He always insisted that he 'knew Indians' if my housemates and I failed to laugh at his racist jokes about the country. My employer was an old, very eccentric white woman with a 'considerable inheritance' who went to school with Princess Anne, if her stories are to be believed. She owned her own acupuncture practice and hoarded to the point of being unable to use her bedroom. My job was to clean around this mess and cook meals for her teenage daughter a few nights a week. She described the job as a 'childcare' role, but I would have described it as a 'I have a girl at my beck and call who needs money' role.

My landlord and employer seemed to see me as an odd curiosity: a deadpan, openly working-class girl with a university education. They both liked to engage me in chats where they'd ask me about my future plans—i.e., what career I had in mind when I was done with education and this grotty little period of my life. With a

benefactor's air, they would then try to offer me their 'connections' in whatever field I mentioned. I'm sure there are some people who offer connections and opportunities freely, but some like to see if dangling the promise of a leg-up will make you rather more agreeable. Or, when they really do have the connections they promise, are trying to indebt you to them and gain ownership over any future success, thus making a new connection in you.

Despite not being interested in working in publishing, I eventually ended up telling them both that I was interested in working in publishing. This was because I quickly learned that whatever version of the truth I told them was an unacceptable answer to the question 'What do you want to do next?'

The first version of the truth was:

'I don't know what I want to do. I really wanted to become an academic, but I was just bullied by another posh man (who went to Harvard and Oxford, don't you know?) into giving up that dream, so now I'm mourning that imagined future while fighting a breakdown.'

Translated for conversation:

'I'm not sure what I want to do, I've fallen out of love with academia. It's just a little too buttoned-up for me!'

The second version of the truth was:

'I want to be a writer who works for themselves, doesn't have to answer to the likes of you, and makes enough to live on. I'd really rather not tell anyone this, though, because uttering my true desires aloud might jinx them?! Also, because you're going to tell me to think practically, work towards a real career and that there's no money in writing.'

Translated for conversation:

I'd really like a role where I can use my writing and research skills!'

Not knowing what you want to do is unacceptable and unambitious. Wanting to be a writer is ridiculous, unattainable, and even if you do publish something, don't forget: you're going to be poor forever!

The best thing to do is pretend you want a 'proper job'. A job where you get to 'climb the ladder' and eventually get a job as an Editor—wait, not ambitious enough, Senior Editor—at a major publishing house. A job where all the fun is sucked out of reading because all you do is speed-read manuscripts on the tube. This is a perfect goal for the would-be benefactors in your life, because they have a niece who works for Penguin Random House and they can connect the two of you!

I'd told the publishing lie to this girl on my course called Blanche, who'd decided we were friends. One day she told me that the girlfriend of the academic who'd bullied me worked in publishing in London. She said I should email the academic about getting my own meeting with his girlfriend's boss. (Are you following this?) After some probing, I discovered that a 'meeting' was actually a coffee, pastry and a nice chat that went nowhere for Blanche's career but she had a lovely time and now has a 'contact'.

Blanche grinned at me with obvious excitement as I tallied up what all of this would cost. A return train ticket to London, two or more tube trips to whatever cafe was nearest to the publishing office, and then whatever a coffee and pastry cost that week. I internally debated if I could justify not ordering food, even if she did, and if it would make me seem as poor as I am, or if I would just seem skinny and focussed. I realised I'd need a new body to seem skinny and a whole new wardrobe to not seem poor.

New wardrobe! With a new top, trousers and shoes—whoops, also a new bra, because those changing room lights really show you how much your wireless hippy bra makes your tits sag—you would

end up near broke and struggling to buy next semester's books. 'Aw, that sounds nice but I don't think I will.'

She pushed me on this for a while, in front of all the other people I took the master's course with. I ended up admitting that I wasn't sure about publishing and didn't want to pursue the connection if I wasn't sure. She was exasperated with me, 'Grace, you need to start networking!'

These people who I broadly lump together as posh are a nightmare for trying to force me to be like them: 'go-getters'. I couldn't be less go-getter-ish if I tried. Even if I was eager to go meet with this mystery woman, even if I was willing to dip into my savings for transport to London, I had already been excluded by the gatekeeper of this opportunity. He'd belittled and bullied me on my first day of the course, ignored me completely in favour of his phone in a one-on-one meeting, and slept with one of the students on the course. I was not going to ask that man for a favour.

I told both the landlord and the employer about this fake publishing dream of mine, when they'd pushed me on the career subject, and they both offered me contacts that I turned down. Contacts that seemed so vague I wasn't sure they existed. One was supposedly a former employee who had definitely done something in publishing five years ago and yes, maybe I still have his phone number. No, lady. Even if I did call this man and he was now the CEO of HarperCollins, there's no way I could turn any unsolicited call into a job offer. I haven't been bred for it.

'Breeding' is their word, their little eugenics term. They are trained to be these cut-throat nasty little people. They're brought up to have a confidence that might take me decades to achieve. That decades-long confidence would be earned, though, and they've earned nothing.

These people will order you to have drive, to aspire, to take their contacts and become part of their little collection. But everything they have is stolen. It took me a long time to realise, despite knowing where this wealth comes from, where their confidence comes from, where their success comes from, and to realise that there's nothing wrong with me. I'm not broken to be content with what I have—plus a little extra for a reasonably-priced slice of cake. It's not wrong to be enjoying my cafe job more than my postgraduate degree. They're broken to keep needing more and more and more. Their need to own everything is not a sign of success.

One time my landlord came over to 'fix' something (look at it and promise to call a contractor) and wanted to have the career goals conversation with me again. He asked me where I was working. I said I worked in a cafe. He made a face as if someone had just put their dirty foot in his mouth.

- 'Eurgh... Why don't you buy a cafe?'
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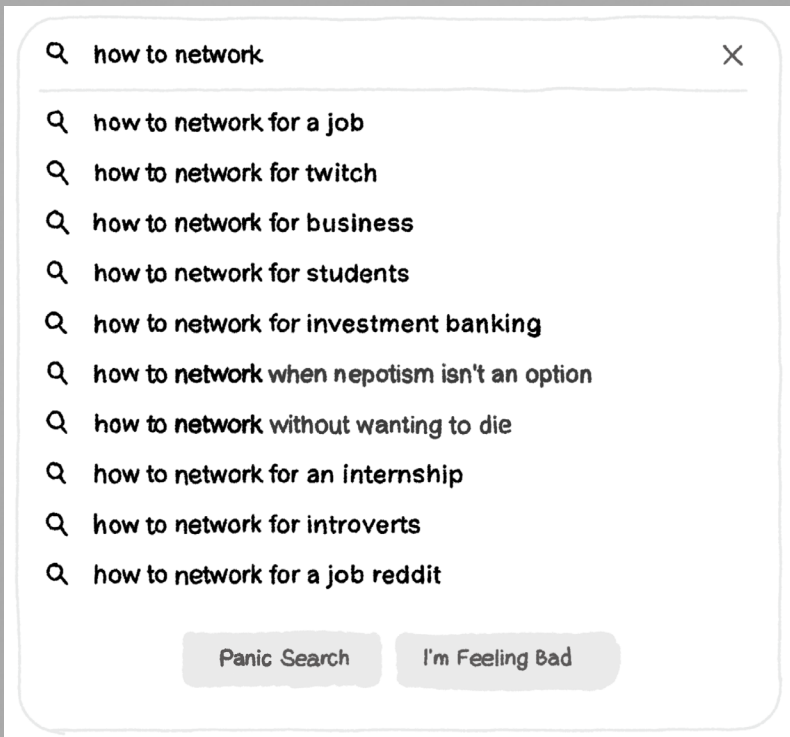


Image Credit: Grace Carmen



Bad
Faith
in
the
Working
Class

D. Hunter

The responses to *Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Intergenerational Self*¹ by Sam Friedman, David O'Brien and Ian McDonald, along with its companion piece *Why do so many professional, middle-class Brits insist they're working class?*² by Sam Friedman, has been an amusing distraction for me. In sociology Twitter-land, I've primarily seen one gang chin-stroking and calling it interesting, and another yelling 'It happens here too ya bastards!' In the corners of social media where the organised left congregate, there have been quiet murmurings of 'Fucking middle-class twats', but mostly the response is 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' The only other social media world I look at is football analytics, where neither piece of writing has really been noted.

My own take on the articles is that they're fine, part of a strain of sociological research which explains what is patently obvious to those of us born into what for now I'll call 'economically marginalised communities'. Many of us have never entered into the elite spaces covered in the research, but have experienced a plethora of deflecting tactics by individual denizens of those spaces. For those of you who haven't read the article, the major takeaway is that many people in elite occupations and from backgrounds which include private schools, ponies, skiing holidays, high-wage-earning parents—and all the other general trappings of what the authors call 'economically privileged'—emphasise their working-class identity. They legitimise this identification by talking about their parents or their grandparents' childhoods. According to the articles, this identification enables them to understand their current social position as one they've earned on their own merit. As the authors put it:

1 Friedman, S O'Brien, D. and McDonald, I. (2021) 'Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Intergenerational Self', *Sociology*

2 Friedman, S. (2021) "Why do so many professional, middle-class Brits insist they're working class?" in *The Guardian* 18th January 2021

‘We would therefore argue that these intergenerational understandings of class origin should also be read as having a performative dimension; as deflecting attention away from the structural privilege these individuals enjoy, both in their own eyes but also among those they communicate their “origin story” to in everyday life. At the same time, by framing their life as an upward struggle “against the odds”, these interviewees misrepresent their subsequent life outcomes as more worthy, more deserving and more meritorious.’

As I mentioned before, this is fucking obvious, but I appreciate the research because I can now quote an academic paper when I point out this behaviour when it happens in front of me. I am also on the fringes of academia now, so I'm probably going to get a chance to see more and more of this behaviour, and being able to cite some work is going to be useful. It is however just one in a large bag of tricks that the economically privileged use on a daily basis against those from economically-marginalised communities.

There are plenty of these little tricks, some of them coated in a veneer of neutrality, appropriateness, civility, morality, and taste. Simply put, they are framed as the right way to be human, and the punitive measures applied for stepping outside of this right way are presented as fair and just. They range from exclusion from social circles due to expressing the wrong kind of emotions, to the social exclusion of imprisonment due to the wrong kind of economic activity. One of the tricks that's often performed within the political left is the cry of ‘THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!’

Now before you get grumpy, not everyone who says this is deploying a trick, as there is a helpful and strong argument in favour of this two-class analysis. It highlights the fact that there is a specific group of people on global and national levels who benefit the

most from the economic, political, and social order of things.³ The owning-class-vs.-working-class class analysis also means we have a lot more people on our team. It can, more than any other analysis, be objectively measured and easily explained. For those of us in this for the political organising, this analysis has many merits. However, not all those who insist on yelling ‘THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU’RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!’ whenever any debate around class arises, are doing so in good faith—and those that are acting in good faith are facilitating those who aren’t. Even under a two-class analysis there are massive material differences between those in its conception of the working class, and I’d argue these material differences can lead to very different interests.

The trick—actually I’m going to stop calling it a trick here: the act of violence—that *Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Intergenerational Self* highlights is real. If you view the world through the two-class analysis, then it’s an act of inter-class violence. If you go for a three-class analysis, then it’s one of middle-class violence over the working class. The authors, for good or bad, have gone for a three-class analysis. To them there is a measurable and easily-identifiable middle class, but if your focus when reading the article is on the two-vs.-three conundrum, and not the acts of violence, then you might need a glass of water and a good nap.

In my first book *Chav Solidarity* I used the term ‘middle class’ (usually followed by some kind of disparaging remark) on every two or three pages. By the end of my second book *Tracksuits, Traumas and Class Traitors* I was promising I’d never use the term middle class again, deeming it unhelpful. Dear reader, I have used it again. Researching my third book, I’ve interviewed 100 social movement participants about their ideas and experiences regarding class. The split between those who use a two-class analysis and those who use a three-class (or more) analysis was about 40/60, but many

3 Dorling, D. (2015) *Inequality and the 1%*, London: Verso

of those who would open up with a hard-line defence of a two-class analysis would still talk about the middle-class in economic and cultural terms. Some would talk about it in reference to the communities they come from, as a descriptor of the setting, and others—nearly always those who grew up in the '80s's and '90s—described an aspiration to become 'middle class' that was prevalent amongst those they knew. Others would talk about its usage within lefty social movements as a kind of boogie man, an all purpose term to describe some of the worst patterns of behaviour within the left. I still have to really work through the interview transcripts, so perhaps something else will come forth, but given these two takes, is it possible to suggest that 'middle class' is less a class of people, and more a class of being and action? No, I don't think so either. It was just a thought.

I suspect at the heart of the 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' refrain, and any rebuttal to it, are questions regarding tensions and confusions about the relevance and meanings of exploitation and oppression. Exploitation in the context of class refers to the extraction of surplus labour in economic production, and oppression refers to the marginalisation and misrecognition of a group or individual based upon their class position. Supporters of a two-class analysis argue that what fundamentally matters is the exploitation of the working class by the owning or capitalist class. They say it is the relationship to the means of production and the appropriation of surplus labour that defines class. In this view the questions of oppression have little relevance in conversations regarding class.

This perspective unites in a common struggle the college lecturer in Derby, England with the farmer in Kano, Nigeria, and the tech worker in Montpellier, France with the garment factory worker in Bangalore, India. All are having their surplus labour appropriated by the capitalist/owning class. In emphasising the unity of struggle, space is created for the denial of the ways in which the college

lecturer in Derby benefits from the exploitation of their fellow workers in Bangalore and Kano. The end of the farmer's and the factory worker's exploitation is not necessarily in the interests of the college lecturer and the tech worker. Within the UK and other colonial nation states, the entire population benefits from this exploitation to varying levels, even if their labour is being exploited at the same time.

The ideas of racial capitalism proposed by Cedric Robinson⁴ and Ruth Gilmore,⁵ and the Marxist-feminist work of Maria Miles⁶ and Silvia Federici,⁷ offer up more rigorous critiques of the ways in which race and gender are points on which exploitation can occur *within* the working class as well as *to* the working class. But apparently such ideas are not good enough for those who continue to state 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' Exploitation of women's reproductive labour creates class divisions within the household, and the colonisation carried out by white Europeans maintains class divisions along racial lines that have been present since the birth of capitalism. Only in ignoring these two features of capitalism can one come to the conclusion that there are objectively only two classes. I think 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' is a strategic position, one which like most strategies has pros and cons, but in using it we should be able to drill into its cons, because god knows the enemy will—it already has.

4 Robinson, C. (2019). *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance* (Quan H., Ed.). London: Pluto Press

5 Gilmore, R. (2007) *Golden Gulag Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing, California*: University of California Press

6 Miles, M. (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a world scale*. London: Zed Books

7 Federici, S. (2017) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York: Autonomedia

Whilst the exploitation of the working class along racial or gendered lines is acknowledged, the question of class oppression is one that is often ignored by those holding a two-class analysis. It can be argued that a three-class system analysis swings too far the other way, in overemphasising the role the middle class plays in operating the tools of oppression against the working class, and minimising how owning class exploitation of the working class creates class positions. However, I'd argue that an analysis of the mechanisms of class oppression that have been implanted into the everyday lives of some segments of the working class is vital in comprehending the class system as it currently operates.

These tools are operated through both social and political institutions, but also cultural practices. When the focus remains on the institutions, the two-class analysis left is more willing to listen, as it can be rolled into a general critique of the state or government policy. More pushback is received when this is expanded to include the individuals who work within state institutions and the ways in which they may have differing interests to the people they engage with via these institutions. Whether it's called the middle class or not, a segment of the population has been generated who are socialised to work in these institutions and they have taken their work home with them.

At home and in their communities, a culture has developed. People are raised in this culture, and then go out and join social movements, where they reproduce what they've learned back home. Certain forms of behaviour are good, certain forms of behaviour are bad, some will be rewarded, others will be punished. There is a bounty of literature detailing the various ways in which the more economically-privileged segment of the working class oppresses and dominates the more disadvantaged parts through a variety of social, cultural, political and yes,

economic processes.⁸ Just as important is the fact that everyone who is from those more disadvantaged parts will have their own descriptions of how this oppression and domination occurs. If 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' is true, then it does not speak highly of the working class. Those who talk of a middle class, or more than two classes, won't talk about intra-class violence, they'll state that it's the middle classes who are carrying out the oppression and domination, often at the behest of the owning and capitalist class, but not always, sometimes it's just in their interests.

That said, specifically defining this middle class in a way that is comprehensive and without flaws is a bit of a minefield. Occupation? Surely a university lecturer is middle-class? Nope, there's a host of university lecturers who have identified the ways in which they are dominated and oppressed by middle-class peers in their line of work, as well as being exploited by the universities they're employed by. Nevermind the precarious employment status of many junior academics. And surely a plumber is working-class? But their employment can be better paid and more secure than those junior academics, and they might well occasionally hire/exploit someone. Artists? Writers? Ok, that's definitely the middle class! Sounds like you're saying working-class people can't be creative. Maybe then it's the context you were raised in? But as overlapped as it is, social mobility in the UK does exist. There are

8 One thread of literature covering the ways segments of the working class are oppressed by those with greater levels of social, cultural and economic capital are feminist sociologists from the UK who are developing the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Scholars such as Imogen Tyler, Bevely Skeggs and Steph Lawler.

Lawler S. (2005) Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities. *The Sociological Review*. 2005;53(3):429-446.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.

Tyler, I. (2013) *Revolting Subjects Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books.

MPs, CEOs, elite sportspeople, scientists, lawyers, and journalists who were born poor and working class, and are now what—rich and working class?

How do we define who still gets to claim the working-class position? There's a bit too much 'I know it when I see it' discourse going on for my liking. But for all its flaws (and there are many⁹), the term 'middle class' can get us into some of the difficult and perhaps important questions, ones which engage a little more with the world as we're living it, rather than the one we've read about in books.

The 'THERE ARE TWO CLASSES, YOU'RE DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS!' argument may have had a chance of working at the stage in capitalist development when economic privileges were first handed out to segments of the working class, but the divisions and their reproduction have long gone past the point in which naming them can be considered divisive. Instead, naming them might enable us to do something about them. When someone calls someone or something middle-class, rather than focus on the precise definition of what middle-class is, we could engage with the actions being highlighted (such as the symbolic violence described by Friedman et al.'s research). Rather than ignoring the attempts of the economically privileged to legitimise the privileges capitalism has granted them, we could be investigating how they might affect our organising efforts.

The acts of violence Friedman et al. examine, and the others I've mentioned above, have been explored by activists, academics and others for a long time now. Still there are those within the left who refuse to acknowledge them and build responses to them into their political practice. There's a whole host of reasons

9 Weiss, H. (2019) *We have never been Middle Class: how social mobility misleads us*. London: Verso

for this, and I'm not in the mood to make a bunch of bad faith accusations. So instead I'll suggest that there is simply a practical political organising reason to take them into account. If your organisation claims a working-class identity, and is primarily made up of those who have the economic, social and cultural capital of the 'middle class', when someone who identifies as working-class and who has the economic, social, and cultural capital of 'working class' rocks up, they might think you're all cunts. This isn't about flat caps, tracksuits, opera vs. hip hop, football, broadsheet vs. tabloid, or regional accents. It's resources, access, emotions, and embodiment. It's about different parts of the working class being bred for different roles in capitalism and us having to identify and disentangle what that means as we go along.

As revolutionary socialists, communists, and anarchists of different flavours, whatever class analysis we have, I think we have two choices. We can either continue fighting over the specific language we use to describe the classes, until one analysis wins and the victors can dance in victory of whatever dystopian nightmare the capitalist class have in the meantime created for us, or we can come to an understanding that these differing class analyses are tools for us to comprehend the world around us in order to respond to the gross inequity, injustice, and general fucking devastation that surrounds us. It's quite possible that whichever analysis we subscribe to, the other one might have something we can learn from, particularly when it comes to the reproduction of capitalist violence in our everyday organising.

M

Aislinn Shanahan Daly

A child of freedom, my eyes slept.
Once the television stood before me
as towers fell over and over in the news reel.

Today I draw you up in my head as monolith.
Tomorrow I hold your limp hand like a confused dog.

Life is in fast motion and lights are running like
strings through a half-blinded window. Each string a
bow to my organs, I beg to spill out. Each pixel is
refracted into the white snow of the television;
each tragedy is me.

Apprenticeship

Wayne Dean-Richards

With his back to the guard our tutor counts out pencils, hands us sheets of paper, says, "Write about what you know," which's how I come to write about what started me on the road to this fucking place:

I was fourteen and some beef between me and another kid needed to be settled. If we'd tried to settle it in the school yard a teacher would've broken it up, why we waited till school was done and hiked up to the back of these broken down old houses, me, the kid, and the usual audience who gather for bloodletting.

The kid outweighed me, but was scared, why he grabbed me and tried to hold on, why I butted him and it was over.

Only it wasn't, because out of the blue his older brother turned up and rushed me, was a whole head taller, but wasn't thinking cold.

I was, and timed it right—

Now there were two of them on the deck, and from then on I was the go to guy for such things, just kids' stuff at first, but, later, much more than that...

Creativity Where We Live, Not Pygmalion-like Escape Ladders:

**Creating a Working-Class Education for a Digital World
Peter Shukie**

The All-seeing Eye of the Middle-class Education System

When Orwell wrote *The Road to Wigan Pier* he probably thought little of its impact on those about whom he wrote. The people of Wigan were largely viewed as the poor unfortunates, the observed, the objects from which this expert eye might forge a damning indictment on industrial towns.

Wigan, my hometown, is characterised by sporting achievement, northern soul, music, comedians, artists, poets, politics, being the birthplace of Gerard Winstanley (who developed the notion of the public space as common treasury), and much else. Yet it has struggled to throw off the image Orwell gave of a bleak, miserable landscape of hovels and tripe populated by unfortunates of hardy, yet cheery disposition despite the horrors of their existence. Others have revisited Orwell's work over the decades since its first publication to reveal yet more about the lives of the working class (Campbell, 1981; Armstrong, 2015). The aim here is not to offer anything like such a retracing, my steps in working class Wigan were my original ones and remain that despite later awareness of earlier travellers. Instead, I found in Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* a more familiar narrative, that of the middle-class observer of lives beyond their own, which they immediately define in relation to their values and behaviours.

It is common to find the travails of the middle class venturing out amongst various tribes and territories of the planet. It often seems exclusively their right to attempt to represent these spaces as alternate, different to their own, and thus ripe for a remoulding so they become more like themselves.

This eye of false objectivity in the head of a remote expert observer becomes dangerous when it is the model by which we have designed our education systems. This leads to a situation in which entire populations, communities, countries, and regions become in

deficit. The gap between what is expected and what exists is based entirely on a middle-class perspective. The all-seeing eye of the middle class is at best myopic and more often than not completely blind. This article explores the possibility of a more emancipatory way of seeing education in a digital world.

Why We Need to Create a Working-class-inspired Education System

The emphasis on a working-class education comes from a resistance to middle-class values and approaches to life. If we continue in establishing that education's purpose is to *raise* the working class to become like the middle class, the act of teaching and of learning is one of cleansing. Working-class students can only be treated, reformed, and have non-middle-class behaviours eradicated. This is a view of the working class as a disease to be treated.

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- Establishing places of learning that arrive like spaceships into towns and cities, within but always apart from the communities they arrive in, is perhaps more clearly visible in universities than further education colleges and training providers. Yet all of these places arrive with a national and international, rather than local, agenda. An education system decided by the wealthy and the powerful prioritises the concerns of the wealthy and the powerful. These define what we learn and what is considered important, decided remotely rather than in the communities they serve. What we lose then is the potential for colleges to become porous, community-owned and directed spaces for learning, sharing and creating relevant local responses to diverse issues faced by the people they serve.

The Road to Wigan Pier and its subsequent revisits establish that poverty is an issue and one that bears investigation. In all three cases the focus on working-class culture is viewed cheek-by-jowl with concerns of poverty. While Campbell (1981) considers the gothic

dress exhibited in 1980s Wigan as a form of working-class revolt, it is less clear how the middle-class gothic in Buckinghamshire derives their purpose and motivation. Such university or publishing house investigations appear rooted in the alleviation of inequality. The logic is that raising awareness leads to solving the problem. The voices of the working class in these texts are present, albeit interpreted by authors, editors, and eventually readers. What we are actually reading about is not working-class lives, but those of the authors, the direction they choose to focus the camera or microphone, the elements of other lives they choose to include. These voices are not our own. We need to reclaim these stories by writing them ourselves and making these lives part of our education system.

A Class Apart

In the early 2000s I was working with excluded young people at a training provider whose key remit was to keep everyone attending. The range of backgrounds was diverse, but also showed similarity in postcodes, stories of school exclusion, lack of certified achievements from education, and common issues with drink and drugs—either their own or within the family. My own presence there was background related: I was told explicitly in my interview I was ‘being given a chance’ because I lived on a council estate. The thinking was that I could relate better, as if we must all share some kind of collective social housing DNA passed around on the basis of where we lived. Stupid though that assumption was, there was a link; I had experienced these tedious patronising approaches myself and recognised I was not working with circumstances and postcodes, but people.

In a class of 25 young people I initially had to use the standard materials purchased by the provider: a guide to employability. Task one was the development of a working diary with each individual asked to reflect on the life of someone they lived with

who worked, and how it might differ from those who did not. Regularly, over these first few months, the same thing occurred with nobody having what they considered a working person in their household. A major factor in their attendance was the payment of £50 granted on full attendance for the week, a decisive factor in the period before the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was provided to a wider college populace. The regular line of family waiting outside the provider's building on Friday's payday highlighted the significance this payment had for entire families, not just those on the courses. Our group was in a separated room, apart geographically and at a distance culturally and resource-wise from the general business of the provider. In a room with barred windows we found a freedom based on lack of interest from managers interested only in attendance figures. It meant we might become innovative and playful in creating courses and activities that would attract people who had a record of finding attendance an anathema for most of their lives. Most importantly, it meant my own fledgling steps as an educator could find the space to include dialogue and be led by those people in the room. These early days included humanism and an interest in Carl Rogers, but increasingly on critical pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire (1998, 1999, 2005). These world famous educators were a lifeline and a way to think differently. A way to think we were important and that the system was wrong in thinking otherwise.

In our classroom of the disadvantaged it was clear nobody saw themselves as disadvantaged. Our stories and backgrounds were algorithmically assigned as marginalised and open to the crisis funding of the programme. Each lent themselves, one way or another, to a tidy allocation as NEETs (Not in Education or Training) that meant the students became valuable commodities for training courses that could wrest them from these depths. But within the groups, the stories were of music, fashion, laughter, adventures in and around their estates, births, deaths, fights, hopes, dreams, and fears. As part of one session we watched a documentary, *Kelly*

and her Sisters (Carlton TV 2001) about a young family living on a council estate in tough conditions. I had anticipated we would start by considering the film a catalyst for discussion around poverty and the pressures it causes. This did occur in part, but it was clear that the young people in the session did not see their situation as in any way linked to this televised depiction. This was poverty on screen, and not the rich real lives they lived.

A decade later a documentary crew visited our area to create a narrative of poverty and fecklessness (*Trouble on the Estate*, Panorama, ITV, 2015). I had left the organisation by then and wondered how our group would discuss that depiction of themselves, stripped of beauty or agency and laid out as pallid ghosts of televisual poverty. I suppose the same way we thought then, totally unaware of our lives being marginal. I mean, we all were very central, active parts of our own lives. What made such lives marginal was the distance from a centre that we had no part in shaping and that was invisible to us.

Updating Exclusion for the Digital Age

A simplistic notion is found at the root of education as transformation that confuses mere access to educators, resources and qualifications with unproblematic potential to transform communities and individuals. Eubanks (2011) evidences a naivety in expecting increasing access to technology to ‘float all boats’ (p.4) while ignoring societal imbalance. In Eubank’s study, marginalised groups of women living in a YWCA were skilled in technology and employed in high-tech industries but remained locked in cycles of low-pay, precarious employment and insecure housing. In her later research, Eubanks (2017) reveals a technology infrastructure increasingly designed to create systems that are ‘automating inequality’ with private corporations melded with public services to ‘profile, police and punish the poor’. Through algorithms that build in concepts of marginalisation and surveillance, the systems of

support become automated as technologies red-flagged working-class people as those most likely to be sanctioned. The frustration, anger, destitution, and even death that results from the creation of digital ramparts across Eubank's case studies highlights the impact of digital policies on human life—almost exclusively working-class and poor human life. As one of Eubank's respondents warns us 'it's us now, but watch out. It will soon be you' (2011). The 'us' in question relates to the working class. The 'you', a safer, although increasingly-at-risk middle class. History suggests that mitigation often comes to the aid of the wealthier, middle classes almost as often as it fails to materialise for those lower down the economic spectrum. The Ken Loach film *I, Daniel Blake* (Laverty, Loach, Johns & Squires, 2017) adds a powerful narrative based around similar experiences: an increasingly automated and digitally defended welfare system that separates out human stories and replaces them with algorithmic brutality. Yet, viewing these horrors of systemic violence in celluloid clarity has done little to stop its spread.

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Such systemised marginalisation and persecution of the poor becomes one not only allowed by the systems of government, but part of the very fabric and purpose of those systems. The drive toward an increased digitalisation of the state is occurring globally, but the marginalising instinct precedes these technological innovations. A mistrust of authoritarian and discriminatory digital infrastructure is also well-established in working-class communities who are already aware of the unjust principles these hierarchies of control are built upon. While the *Digital Britain* (2009) strategy describes switching public services to digital as cost-saving and increasing satisfaction rates (p.4) there is no mention of challenging societal imbalance. The establishment of a digital welfare state sees those outside the preferred routes as in deficit just as much as its analogue society ancestor did. The *UK Digital Strategy 2017* policy paper establishes the main concern for communities as being increased access to broadband and tackling the digital skills gap. For education, the emphasis is on procurement of technology and the

establishment of increased technology infrastructure (ibid.). The widening of a technological infrastructure appears to be one-way traffic and top-down. Models of deficit come via government and industry concerns around economic value and transferable skills that relate to consumer and industry metrics. Where any mention of correcting imbalance or injustice occurs, it is in eradicating the lack of access to the infrastructure needed to engage in this vision of a digital Britain. In such a worldview, the establishing of cost-savings, consumer-satisfaction ratings, and efficient access would replace any notions of social change, community-generated or localised responses to education, or alternate approaches to what society or community may represent. The education crisis of Covid-19 has only just begun to show that the problems with technology go deeper than just access to machines. We need a different approach to what education is for and who it involves, not just on what machines we access it.

From analogue to digital, a middle-class view of society dominates and continues to marginalise the working class. In prioritising access to digital education, it ignores the ways that various social groups experience the world and the capital infrastructure that technology depends on. As employer-led models are prioritised by economic need and government agendas, they reinforce a sense that a separated, hierarchical, and often exploitative sector is left in control. A recognition of the differences between classes is also significant: while the education system historically appeared to prioritise success as white collar employment (Todd, 2014. p.222) these jobs held little value or status for many working-class communities (ibid.). The differing views of what success might appear to be were not only around status but also a 'suspicion of the petty authority wielded by middle managers and bureaucrats... entering such occupations...was nothing to be proud of' (ibid.). Technology in educational and civic contexts becomes aligned with power and social hierarchies. It is simultaneously stripped of its power to democratise and widen networks that make it

so ubiquitous in other aspects of life. By prioritising ownership of technology as a means to access the systems of control, the continuation of education as a creator of a denigrated working class continues. By manipulating technology as a tool of control and embedding that in educational infrastructure the tools of social inequality become future-proofed.

An Education of the Social and the Fallacy of Mobility

Educational discourse often seems rooted in Pygmalion-like concerns with transformation. First recognise the error of our ways/speech/manners and then comply with the authority of the teacher. Work hard, and you too can become like them. Social mobility: the proof that society works and education is our saviour. Diane Reay says that

- ‘social mobility is primarily about recycling inequality rather than tackling it.’ (Reay, 2012. p.593). Rather than a simplistic notion such as this, Reay suggests, we must recognise that ‘in order to have a more socially just educational system the wider social context needs to look very different, and, in particular, the gap between the rich and the poor needs to be substantially reduced’ (p.593).

The destructive forces of inequality can feel omnipresent and irrepressible with subsequent feelings of helplessness adding to the inevitability of a world that feels wrong. A significant part of such a powerful ‘wrong’ is the knowledge that we are part of it. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) describe conventional employment in capitalist societies as relationships based on compliance that necessitate ignorance of any wider inequalities they propagate (p.262). From the exploitation of poorer and less-educated markets to sell fatal tobacco products or the exploitative manufacturing of life-saving medicine, the role of the individual worker is complicit but voiceless. The result is a situation in which ‘You might disagree with the purpose to which your work is being put, you might not

even know what the purpose is, but you are not employed to have opinions about such things and not to express them' (ibid.).

Employee-owned organisations, they argue, might reduce if not eradicate this tendency toward absolved responsibility. From the perspective of education, the relationship is clouded by a sense of supposedly being explicit in creating creative, critical thinkers. Clouded because this expectation is itself rooted in expanding neoliberal purpose and the language of market and consumer dominating educational institutions (Hall & O'Shea, 2011). We might find space to generate alternative voices and practices, but at some point, institutional learning is faced with metrics of employer-validated relevance or economic output. How might it be possible to create the language of new possibilities and radically altered societal structure to challenge social injustice while locked within institutions that serve to uphold the status quo? In Wilkinson and Pickett's view, inequality thrives in the vacuum created because democracy is excluded from economic considerations (p.264). The law of the market provides the validation for increased inequality. Their solution is for cooperatives, employee ownership of businesses and representation on company boards (ibid.). As with Paulo Freire's (1999) response to challenges of the new information age, they recognise the importance of the institutions. We cannot abandon educational institutions but we must transform them. McLaren (2014) describes how teachers are 'encouraged to be good "systems people", to create synthetic environments for our students. [That] dish out knowledge like fast food; burger specials arrive limp and overcooked from the Insight Kitchens of Google, Twitter and Apple' (p.171). The purpose is standardised and efficient learning/teaching that creates opportunity for only 'practical' and 'technical' forms of knowledge, and the real value of 'productive' or 'transformative' (ibid.) knowledge is lost.

Rather than getting rid of institutions, McLaren's call is for purposeful and powerful organisations that use education to

transform by fighting inequality, creating education that addresses an ideology that reifies the manipulation of human labour for capitalist gain. What we need are

‘...theories that provoke teachers to question the value assumptions that underlie their technocratic cultural terrain and throw open to scrutiny the classroom practices and social relations linked to the capitalist law of value that future teachers are forced to acquire during their teacher education’ (p.172).

Class has to be recognised as a concern of the current education system that not only fails to address the denigration of working-class communities, but that promotes it.

Class and Education: The Toxic Metaphors of Ladders and Lifeboats.

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- The problem of inequality in education appears two-fold. On one hand, despite moves towards widening participation the data highlights a predominance of white, middle-class students from privileged backgrounds in Russell Group universities (Reay et al, 2010, p.107). Even where working-class students have achieved the grades to access these institutions they are less likely to attend (ibid.). Second, even in pursuing a corrective of inequality by accessing these institutions, success becomes individualistic and reifies the image of lone working-class students being rescued from the misery of their existence. This reflects concern with a recycling of inequality rather than tackling it (Reay et al, 2010) and the lifeboats that allow salvation for a precious few further embed the concept of the drowning masses left behind.

The result of these policies is that whole communities, giant swathes of society, feel left behind in educational terms. Not only as individuals, but whole families and communities become little more than places to escape from. Education acts as a ladder out

to some kind of distant light rather than a powerful/empowering part of regeneration and social betterment. This destroys any meaningful engagement with communities and instead generates an aspirational escapee mentality rooted in fear of loss and failure.

Popular Education, Critical Pedagogy and the Challenge to Middle-class ‘Common Sense’

To establish an alternative to the imbalance of the current structures requires awareness of the ways that education is part of the proliferation of inequality. This occurs in classrooms, between educators and students, as well as on a macro-organisational level of government policy, with economic interest coming first. Initially, the notion of critical thinking appears to ensure that alternate thought is part of the educational process. However, if constrained by achievement based on economic viability and employability (a perpetual shadow curricula in every discipline), then criticality is itself impoverished. Critical analysis—bound by neoliberal common sense and rooted in the assumptions of standardised, middle-class convention—is sanitised and incapable of moving beyond the status quo. Whether through the creation of institutional Massive Open Online Courses or national school curricula, decision making and ownership remain in the hands of universities that are saturated in middle-class values and expectations. What these values create are philosophies of civilising missionaries and salvation as they reach out to communities. What they need to develop are practices of dialogue and shared respect, mutuality and collective purpose.

Paulo Freire (2005) proposes a popular education that relates to communities directly, stripping hierarchical models of teacher-student, to allow for dialogue and problem-solving as a basis for how, and what, we learn. Popular education insists on the recognition of those involved in any educational activity to have a voice in its purpose and its method.

Popular education is the catalyst for the alternative education

model proposed in the remainder of this article. I describe some of the ways that we challenge the creation and maintenance of hierarchical, common-sense approaches to learning that validate only conventional models. Our challenge is based on dialogic approaches to education on a practical level, with multiple participants creating spaces to explore what education might be. Partly, this has resulted in leaving the academy behind and finding fresh air in spaces we can breathe freely. However, many of our experiences occur within the academy, including activities within institutional courses that create dialogic space and find the space to create, reflect, design and build community-facing education based around the stories of those involved.

A Community Digital Platform

● Community Open Online Courses (COOCs.co.uk) is a platform that explores the ways that we could educate based on distributed knowledge and multiple approaches to learning. Everyone that registers is immediately able to create a course. What a course looks like, what it is for, and who is invited become the responsibility and directive of the educator—whoever that educator is and whatever their motivations are. In such a space the working class and its million sub-sections are then not immediately seen as a deficit—a problem that must be civilised by middle-class values in an educational system.

These COOC spaces allow people to create courses within formal educational spaces, but that immediately transfers the purpose and direction of what is taught and learned to others. We play with form, discuss what teachers do, what knowledge looks like, and how we share and discuss it. The impact has been powerful (Shukie, 2018) and shows that people can discover and use more when they see the purpose of doing it in their own lives. This is not technology-led, nor institution-led education. It is purpose-led and provides motivation that cannot be framed in escapism and white-

knight-saviour narratives.

When encouraged to create a space for dialogue, and to create projects based on their own stories, we still have issues of ‘Am I doing it right?’ The response of ‘I do not know, it depends on you and your community’ is to transfer power—a transference that is often deeply unsettling. Shifting from transmission models to purpose-led and community-impact-driven approaches shapes new models of thinking and acting, of being in the world. It is this activism-in-action that can help redesign how we educate and who is involved, to escape desperate hands reaching for rope ladders and futile efforts to scramble upwards. Replacing this with confident communities that design learning opportunities and shape education that works for them and their communities is the way ahead. Pygmalion metaphors can be revisited as an ancient regime that we look back on with sorrow for the way we used to be. Working class as a term for a disparate collective can begin to find its value as the home of indigenous knowledges, local and contextualised expertise, and places of new confidence imbued with responsibility, purpose, and the means to act. We are always part of the story, and central to our own stories. This has to be a part of how we learn and what we choose to explore. That does not fit with Henry Higgins-style visiting experts that correct and modify until we look like them. It requires a participatory and energised engagement with making a world as we need it to be, avoiding designing this in isolation, and becoming skilled in dialogue, creativity, and the ability to share to develop.

Conclusion

The examples of alternative approaches described here can appear in many cases to be already familiar, based on student-led pedagogies. Where they differ is in their purpose. The activities begin by seeing students and teachers as equals, rather than as economic units coming together to complete a transaction

that is counted, measured, and accredited by others. It is in the immediacy of context, on the navigation of each narrative, the inclusion of community and family, and the in-built necessity of our stories that define what value the learning/teaching/knowledge have. Rather than the invisible, inane, and often contradictory edicts, where instructions are 'handed down' without consultation and with the only response one of compliance, these activities relied on activism, engagement, reflection and creation. As the projects unfolded across multiple lives and communities I met with researchers, students, and community educators who had struggled to find support from organisations interested only in functional skills. These institutional limitations meant almost all projects continued in informal spaces in order to grow.

Art therapy courses developed despite a lack of funding because Maths, English, and ICT were not explicit. The rooms were packed because people loved the opportunity to meet, create, and learn.

- All the functional skills were, ironically, in full view and flourishing.
- Organisational myopia may be incapable of seeing this energy, focussed instead on poorly attended courses with all love and purpose removed.

Much like the banking educational model Paulo Freire vehemently resists, we face multiple situations in which knowledge and learning are defined remotely and insisted upon rather than engaged with. We remain with some choice: a decision to reject dehumanising and marginalising practices and to create learning that is inclusive and dialogic. It does not mean every session becomes a discussion, every course a committee, but it does mean that choices made and direction travelled must involve opportunities for all voices to be heard. Technocratic and institutionalised models of learning might well be efficient for some, and certainly seem to be profitable for a select few. Our choice extends to the point where we might ask ourselves whether we consider such impoverished knowledge and inequality of resources as a natural and inevitable consequence.

Are we agents of an educational process of compliance or agents of change?

The examples of how we have created opportunities of engagement have had to begin with an understanding that we all have value; all our voices are worthy of being heard and no one person's experience is greater than any other. Such a basis differs from the status-bound, civilising mission of some middle-class educators' views of working-class communities. Our role as working-class educators is not to ridicule or mock these educators, but to welcome and work with them as people who also contribute to an educational system based on transformation and purpose, not on compliance and the maintenance of unfair and illogical systems. Rather than Orwell's experience of speaking to one community with the intention of reporting to another, we can create educational spaces that encourage direct engagement. In doing so, we develop practices that explore untested feasibility, and a willingness to recognise that our worldview is not the only one. We might have to continue off-road to do this.

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Don't **Solely** Blame
the Working Class for
Racism

Steve Rushton

After Donald Trump lost the US election by less than expected, still attaining the second highest popular vote in US history, the dominant media and social media narrative blamed the white working class. Again, we were defined as the main harbingers of racism.

This is statistically incorrect, dangerous, and counterproductive. Racism is a white problem, strongest in non-working-class white demographics. Yet we seem locked in a seemingly endless cycle. With Brexit over, but remaining a divisive tale that will never go away, I am sure this narrative will pick up again. To tackle racism and to build solidarity, not only do we need to reveal the myth that racism is held predominantly within the white and working class. We need to discuss why this myth persists, so we can deconstruct it.

Why is it Incorrect?

Early analysis of the 2020 US voting demographics shows that the majority of citizens with household incomes above \$100k voted Trump. Over half of those below \$100k did not. Below \$50k even less so. In-depth demographic analysis of Trump supporters in 2016 replicates this statistical trend. That year, US organisation Talk Poverty asserted 'Even among white voters—who were more likely to support Trump than other groups—Trump did better among middle income white voters than low-income ones.'¹

But the facts have not stopped the mainstream media and social media peddling the line that the predominant Trump base was 'poor, stupid, white, racist voters'—story repeated the other end of the north Atlantic about Brexit.

1 Slevin, J (2016) *Stop Blaming Low-Income Voters for Donald Trump's Victory* in Talk Poverty (Talkpoverty.org 16/10/2016)

As geographer Danny Dorling wrote about the 2016 Brexit vote: ‘Of all those who voted for Leave 59% were middle class (A, B or C1), and 41% were working class (C2, D or E). The proportion of Leave voters who were of the lowest two social classes was just 24%. The Leave voters among the middle class were crucial to the final result. This was because the middle class constituted two thirds of all those who voted. If personality traits mattered, it was of some of those who led, funded and ran the campaigns.’

What is really interesting is if you search “white working class” and “Trump” or “Brexit”, you get a series of studies and articles from 2016 onwards quantifying how racism is more prevalent amongst richer white people. The existence of these studies and articles, constantly explaining this, begs the question: why is the myth about the white and working class so resilient?

- We must break the idea that the white and working class is the
- hottest bed for racism.
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Why is it Dangerous?

British society is extremely divided in economic terms between the privileged few and everyone else. The cement that binds this division together, that justifies it, are attacks on working-class people. Alongside the recurrent narrative that calls the white and working class racist and stupid, there are other baseless attacks. Overall, the working class is defined as 'shirkers' or 'strivers' harking back to Victorian conceptions of the undeserving poor. The working class is fragmented by narratives. When ‘working class’ is used—say in corporate media—it often refers to white and working-class men, invisibilising women and people of colour. An intersectional approach is both about recognising all the different ways people are oppressed, and how these oppressions overlap. In a nutshell, society is incredibly divided in material terms, but those at the top also retain their power through divide and rule narratives that pit

the multitude against the multitude. All derogatory attacks are dangerous, including calling poor, white people stupid and racist.

The specific danger in defining those who are white and working class as racist is that it can have a self-fulfilling element. Now I am not excusing racism, nor arguing that calling some people racists makes them so. Instead, what I want to recognise is racism is an endemic issue across all white people, regardless of class. Incorrectly blaming racism solely on the white and working class, masks the deep racism within the establishment, whilst also putting pressure on the fluid range of opinions to move in the wrong direction within the white population. It might underwhelm active solidarity; it might tip people towards disengaging or apathy; or into racist (or stronger racist) stances, whether through action or inaction. It might prevent people from becoming actively anti-racist.

To unpick this, it is important to consider that 'being a racist' is not a fixed position. People's actions depend on the situation, and situations in turn are influenced by the group think of individuals, so racism or anti-racism is a situation in flux.

People could also be on a journey, in a positive sense, doing work on deconstructing their own prejudices, racism included. Likewise, others might be regressing, on a journey going backwards. Just like turtles in a sea, we have agency to move ourselves to a number of different places, swimming against or with tides, working our way through storms. We can choose whether we sink or swim.

But to extend this metaphor, some people in this four-dimensional diagram of space and time, between racism and anti-racism are teetering, and could go either way. This is where self-fulfilling myths are all the more dangerous, pushing some into dangerous waters.

But society is not only a culmination of people with differing and

fluid points of view. We impact each other. The ocean currents are in a sense the dominant narratives, human constructions, that can do most to pull and push us—that we resist or that sweep us away. Thinking how the white working class narrative might impact a small number of people is a way towards imagining how it plays out at a far wider level. So how could the white working class narrative have an impact in a tangible way of a few people?

Compare three white dock workers and three white lawyers, each group working together for the first time. In each situation, one person says something racist, and the others have a chance to call them out. One of the other dock workers might feel defeated, internalising the anti-working-class myth, and thinking this is normal—as over and over they have heard the narrative that working-class people are racists—so they keep their head down and the comment is unchallenged. Whereas someone in a different work environment, in this example the lawyer, might feel more emboldened to call out a racist joke or comment that doesn't belong in how they see their workplace.

Now let us turn to the third person in each situation. For the sake of this thought experiment, let's say this person is easily led in their political views. So in the incident in the dockyard, this leans them towards normalising racism. Whereas the lawyer is as confused politically as they were in the first place.

Although this thought experiment is very crude we could scale this up across society and infer that racism is made worse amongst the white and working class by the myth that it is. It is not the defining factor behind racism, but it intensifies the currents.

I want to offer another thought experiment about the process of depoliticisation. Across society oppressed groups are given the message to keep their head down, be quiet, don't get involved. The misconception of the working class as harbingers of racism plays into this, again just another narrative from a larger web of

ideas. This idea suppresses solidarity or people calling out racism, firstly as they might feel it is hopeless, but also as it reaffirms a message that politics is a dangerous place—a space where they risked being called racists—best avoided.

One microcosm of the depoliticisation of the working class is a small town comprehensive school, where the broad message transmitted to you is that to get by you need to work hard, keep your head down, and avoid the authorities' wrath. You might recognise this school, I do. It does not prepare you for getting involved in politics, it wants you to earn. You do not focus on debating skills or public speaking, as no one is that bothered with what you have got to say. The careers advisor is there to iron out any allusions of being who you want to be, unless you are keen to get spinning on the work treadmill.

So when you speak to people who went to this school, it is not uncommon for them to avoid talking about political things, as if these things are alien and do not concern them. Within a broad bunch of messages, 'the white and working class are racist' narrative only reinforces this. It suggests politics is a dangerous space, better to disengage with it, keep my head down, do not rock the boat.

Why is this Counterproductive?

To tackle racism it is essential to call it out. When the mainstream media focus attention on white and working-class Trump or Brexit supporters, it seems as though it is calling them out and acting against racism. This is not the case. Instead they are averting attention from all racists and demonising the white and working class. If its aim is anti-racist, then it is being counter-productive.

Looking at why the mainstream media perpetuate these myths is important in order to deconstruct them.

Mainstream and corporate media organisations are owned and run by the establishment, pushing audiences towards a range of conclusions. Although there are a few exceptions in the output of corporate media, mostly due to editorial processes and ownership, the gatekeepers generally push narratives that extend the status quo or move the political space into populism.

Some media organisations—and I am sure a range of tabloid newspapers spring straight into your mind—are supportive of rightwing populism. They do not call out racism, rather they facilitate the far right in building momentum based on the myth that they are leading a grand coalition of the have-nots.

Perhaps even more nefarious is how liberal corporate media gives the impression that it is standing against racism, when it often puts white working class racists on a sacrificial altar, from which establishment racists can hide behind.

The extent of the myth solely blaming white and working-class people begs the question, why are liberals doing this? Although the answer to this may have multiple layers I want to emphasise three clear rationales.

1. On a very base level, liberals and centrists can feel better about themselves and blame the white working class for racism.
2. But more strategically, this narrative plays into the broader pro-status quo argument. Specifically, that too much democracy would mean mob rule, and we cannot have that since—as the caricature goes— the mob are all racists.
3. It adds another thread to the conservative undeserving poor dogma, a narrative liberals often push.

If you step back and look at the whole political situation from afar this makes a lot of sense. We live in a society built on class, race,

gender, and other discrimination. In this sense it is no surprise that those advocating for the status quo are enabling narratives that sow those divisions, rather than challenging them. The reason this myth persists so strongly is that the narrative suits both the racist populists and people advocating for the status quo.

Are the few billionaires that own the corporate press, or the editors of television, radio and other media solely to blame for all this counterproductive content? Not exactly. Another element is pack journalism—the way that different media frame a story similarly—which keeps pushing microphones in the faces of white, working-class, racist voices for vox pops, rather than showing white, middle-class or establishment faces supporting Trump or Brexit.

If we think of social media and the way that ideas snowball and trend, we can see this process of pack journalism goes beyond the traditional media. Social media can feed mainstream media and vice versa. A story can appear on one only to amplify a similar narrative on the other. And people on social media may jump aboard sharing a narrative as it is popular, because journalists have all jumped on board with a popular idea. When it comes to derogatory messages, this shows how a few media moguls can push a certain narrative and create an array of people pushing in the same direction.

It was from looking at Twitter and attacks on the white and working class around the US election that prompted me to write this. But right-wing populism happened long before the internet. A few generations ago, it would have been the equivalent of overhearing a tabloid narrative being discussed all across town. What social media does is to make this faster. Also, now the tech CEOs of social media sites have carved off some of the power of the press barons.

All this means when it comes to myths that serve the establishment—such as solely blaming the white and working class

for racism—these dangerous slurs can build momentum faster and whip up into divisive undercurrents quicker.

Yet what is still as true now as ever, is how dangerous generalisations about a class can foster this pack mentality, lessening our abilities to see humanity as one big pack that could work for our common good. We must recognise white supremacy and racism is a problem for all white people, especially those from the most privileged backgrounds and with the most supremacy.

Without this recognition, resilient false myths will persist and the most privileged will do everything in their power to keep pushing these divisive ideas. The establishment originally used violence to establish itself, and structural violence continues to uphold this status quo. But below the surface this same establishment has created and continues to bolster strong narratives to justify its power. To undermine their power, we need to deconstruct all of their derogatory fables.





To tackle racism it is essential to call it out.





Great Expectations

Rebecca Metcalfe

Romford, Essex, 2011

‘You can do ANYTHING at university!’

The woman at the front of our classroom had mousy brown hair, large round glasses, and an enormous blue knitted scarf over an oversized green cardigan, and she waved her hands about with each word. She tapped through the first few slides on the PowerPoint, all of which seemed to contain just pictures, without really saying anything. You could tell from her clipped accent that she’d had to travel a few miles to get here. It was Jobs and Careers Week at school. Mr Goodwin, the deputy head, had organised it for us, so instead of our usual science lesson at this time, we had a talk from a woman none of us had ever met before. Sophie and I sat at the back, our empty notebooks open in front of us. We quickly put the lids back on our pens.

‘Whatever you want, you can DO! If you want to do a course in surfing, you CAN, if you want to do a course on pet food design, you can DO THAT TOO!’ Her eyes bulged with excitement at the prospect of a degree in pet food design, or maybe that was just her glasses. Sophie closed her notebook and put it back in her bag.

‘It’s just fucking dog food though, who cares?’ said Hollie Peters. The whole class erupted into laughter.

‘You may laugh, but many WONDEROUS careers are formed at universities across the country.’

‘Miss,’ said Lily Marsh, ‘what’s the point of that though? My mum says she’ll get me a job at the school she works at, and I only need a BTEC in childcare for that.’

The woman’s hands stopped mid-air, one by her ear and one out in

front of her, as if conducting traffic. She blinked.

‘Oh, well, university isn’t for EVERYONE, it might not be for you.... but this is to show you all the OPTIONS that are out there, all the things you COULD do if you wanted to.’ She tapped through a couple more slides, then stopped at one showing a woman in the kind of nurse’s uniform only ever seen in hospitals on Halloween. The copyright watermark was still visible across the woman’s stomach. ‘For SOME careers you NEED a degree, anything medical, such as nursing or midwifery. Nursing has always been a good route for CLEVER girls. Does anyone HERE want to become a nurse?’

She fluttered her spidery eyelashes at us as she looked around the classroom. Quite a few hands went up, but we all stayed silent.

‘Well, that’s lovely to see, because for girls like YOU, if you’re CLEVER, nursing can be the BEST way out.’

● ● ●
‘Way out of what, Miss?’ asked Lianna Talbot.

The woman clasped her hands together in front of her and held them there, as if in prayer. ‘Oh, you know.... Circumstances.’ She sighed and glanced around the classroom: the cracks in the walls, the stains on the floor, and the gaps in the ceiling where tiles had fallen off.

In assembly that morning, Mr Goodwin had informed us all of the importance of his Jobs and Careers Week. ‘There’ll be important careers information this week, girls,’ he’d said, as we sat on the wobbly plastic chairs that gave us all aching backs, ‘and that’s true for whether you plan to go on to do A-Levels, or a BTEC, or go straight into work.’ He conveniently didn’t mention the sort of work a lot of us would be going straight into at the end of Year 11. The previous Year 11s had opened their leavers’ yearbooks and turned to the page of ‘dvice from Your Teachers’ to see that Mrs

Newman had written: 'ee you all in McDonald's, girls!'

I doubted there was a slide about working in McDonald's on the mousy-haired woman's power point.

I took the lid back off my pen and raised my hand into the air. Sophie looked at me with a confused expression.

'Miss,' I asked, 'what about if you want to do an arts or a humanities course. What if you want to do something like English?'

I didn't often speak up in class, but I was one of the few people in this talk who'd taken a notebook out, and I had questions I wanted to jot down the answers to.

The woman's bug-like eyes swivelled around to me.

'Oh! Teaching is another good way out for clever girls. Lots of primary schools are always on the lookout for BRIGHT young girls who are good with children. Are YOU good with young children?' I closed my notebook and put the lid back on my pen.

'Who'd want to work with kids?' snorted Annabelle Bird, 'I'm going to be a hairdresser, or do nails and beauty, I ain't made my mind up yet.'

The woman sighed.

I looked around the classroom. A sea of girls with blotchy tan from a bottle, plastic nails, and matted hair extensions that didn't match their actual hair. All bought for a few quid down Romford market. Fake, fake, fake, I thought to myself. I'd show them. I'd prove them all damn wrong, and the simpering bug-eyed woman too. I'd prove them all wrong.

‘Well that was a bit pointless,’ said Soph as we filed out for lunch. ‘I know right, I thought it might actually be useful but apparently not.’

‘You seriously thinking of doing English at uni?’

‘Yeah. Why shouldn’t I? I’m reading Dickens right now, and I read a Thomas Hardy book before that. Why can’t I? I want to be a writer.’
‘Is that even a job?’

‘I’m not sure, I was hoping I could ask that careers woman.’

Sophie snorted. ‘I’m not sure about uni anymore. It’s a lot of money, especially since they put it up to nine grand now. Mum’s started working in TK Maxx now so we’re not as behind with the rent anymore, but still. And I’m not sure what I’d study either.’

● It seemed Sophie wasn’t the only one whose thoughts of university
● had been somewhat disillusioned by the bug-eyed woman. The
● other girls in our class were also discussing the university talk on the way to lunch. Mostly their talk involved fits of laughter and imitations of the woman’s wispy, simpering voice.

‘I wouldn’t want to go uni if everyone there is like her,’ said Lily Marsh.

‘Did you see how awful her hair was?’ asked Hollie Peters.

‘Uni’s for fucking weirdos,’ said Annabelle Bird.

I tensed up and once again told myself that these girls were fake and that I was real, and I’d prove them all wrong.

*

That night, sat on the settee, flicking through TV shows, I found an episode of the thing I hated most on television. A show made up

of people from the areas my family and I were born and raised in, and filmed only a few miles away. A supposed reality show based on a stereotype about girls like us. A stereotype that girls at school tried to emulate and copy, each week obsessing over the show: gossiping about their new idols. I couldn't see it then, but I can see it now. The whole set-up of the show and the stories about these people that appeared alongside it in the papers each week. We were supposed to want to be these women. It was, the title told us, 'the only way' to be. We were supposed to want their bodies and their clothes and their glamorous lifestyles. But we were also supposed to hate them. Look at how fake and vapid they were, the magazines told us, but look, wouldn't you just want to be like that! Aged fifteen, I realised none of this, I only absorbed the hate. Weren't they awful? Too stupid, too sexy, too fake. Was it really any wonder I hated where I was from and that I hated myself too?

*

I spent about half an hour channel hopping, and having found nothing I wanted to watch, I turned the PC on and opened up Facebook. And was greeted with a photo of Annabelle Bird. In the photo, which she'd taken herself with a pink Nikon camera in a smeared mirror, she was stood side on, at an angle. She wore black leggings and a pink tank top. The hand that didn't hold the camera was wrapped around her stomach, which was round and stuck out under the tight top. 'Beginnings of the baby bump' was what she'd captioned it.

My reaction, my initial thoughts were the same ones I'd been conditioned to think whenever a woman from the most popular reality show of the year came onto the screen: the word said or implied in every newspaper or magazine article about girls from Essex.

Slut.

*

Next morning, as we lined up outside our form rooms, it was all anyone talked about.

‘Did you see Annabelle’s Facebook status?’

‘Did you see that photo?’

‘Is she pregnant?’

‘Is she actually pregnant?’

‘Who’s the dad?’

‘Oh my god, what a slut.’

‘Annabelle! Are you pregnant!’

Annabelle had just appeared in the corridor, and the questions had started immediately.

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● ‘What? Oh? That?’ She shuffled awkwardly from one foot to the other. Her cheeks turned pink. ‘It was just a joke. Me and Lianna were talking about it on the bus on the way home yesterday. It was just a joke. I’m not actually.... did you guys think I was?’

‘Well yeah, it was fairly convincing.’

‘Well I’m not... I haven’t even ...’

Annabelle was saved by Mr Goodwin appearing from a classroom and telling everyone to head into their form rooms. As Annabelle was in a different form group to me, I didn’t see if her questioning carried on. Me and Sophie went into our form room and took our usual seats while Mrs Huntingdon, our form tutor, took the register. ‘Did you see that photo Annabelle posted?’ Sophie whispered to me. ‘What a slut.’

I nodded.

‘Can you imagine posting something like that. I mean, actually posting that photo, with that caption?’

‘I don’t understand girls like that,’ I said.

‘Right, girls,’ said Mrs Huntingdon, putting down the register, ‘as I’m sure you’re all aware, you’ve all got your personal careers meetings today. It’s a one-on-one meeting with a careers advisor as to what you’d like to do when you leave school.’

‘It’s not that same woman from yesterday is it?’ said someone. Half the class groaned; the other half laughed.

‘No, no, there’s a few different women. Your appointments are all with a lady called Margaret.’

‘Oooh,’ Sophie whispered in my ear, ‘I wonder if it’s Margaret off the Apprentice. Sir Alan Sugar’s friend. She’d be fun.’

Sadly for Sophie, the careers meeting was not with Margaret Mountford from the Apprentice, as I discovered when I arrived at my meeting an hour later. This Margaret was middle-aged, thin and wiry, with a long nose perfect for looking down on us with.

‘So,’ she said to me, peering down at the form we’d been asked to fill out the previous week, ‘you would like to study English at university and be a writer?’

I nodded and smiled. ‘I’m currently reading a Dickens novel! Great Expectations!’ I told her, hoping for enthusiasm about my chosen career path. How many other girls wrote something like that on their careers form, I asked myself? How many other girls in this school had read Dickens? Probably none.

The woman didn't look up. 'Writing isn't a career, dear. And I doubt you're the next JK Rowling.'

My smile disappeared and I slumped down into my seat.

'English can be a useful degree to have though.'

I sat up a bit straighter.

'I've already looked at some university websites at their different courses! I really like the one at the University of East Anglia!'

The woman turned my form over, to a list of my predicted GCSE grades.

'Well you'll need far better than mainly C grades for East Anglia. They don't just let anyone in.'

- I slumped back down again, the shoulders of my too-big blazer
- bunching up against the back of the chair.

Finally, the woman looked up at me.

'I wouldn't be quite so disheartened. You can still try for an English degree, it is your best subject, but look at some other universities and look into some actual jobs, rather than "being a writer". Have you ever thought about becoming a teacher?'

I sighed and shook my head.

'Well don't dismiss it, it's a good route for girls like you. Especially as your science grades aren't good enough to go into nursing. Now, unless you have any questions, I think that's everything? You can head back to class now.'

I made my way back to class, which was an English lesson, although

due to everyone having careers appointments at different times, we'd been told to either catch up on homework or do some silent reading. I sat down next to Sophie and pulled *Great Expectations* out of my bag.

'How was it?'

'Apparently I'm too thick for East Anglia and should become a teacher. I don't want to become a fucking teacher.'

'Oh well, Hollie said she was a bit blunt. She must just be like that with everyone. I'll see what she says to me after lunch.'

'Sir?' came the voice of Annabelle Bird, 'It's half-past, I've got my careers meeting?'

Mr Goodwin looked up from his desk. 'Ah yes, of course, Annabelle. Off you go.'

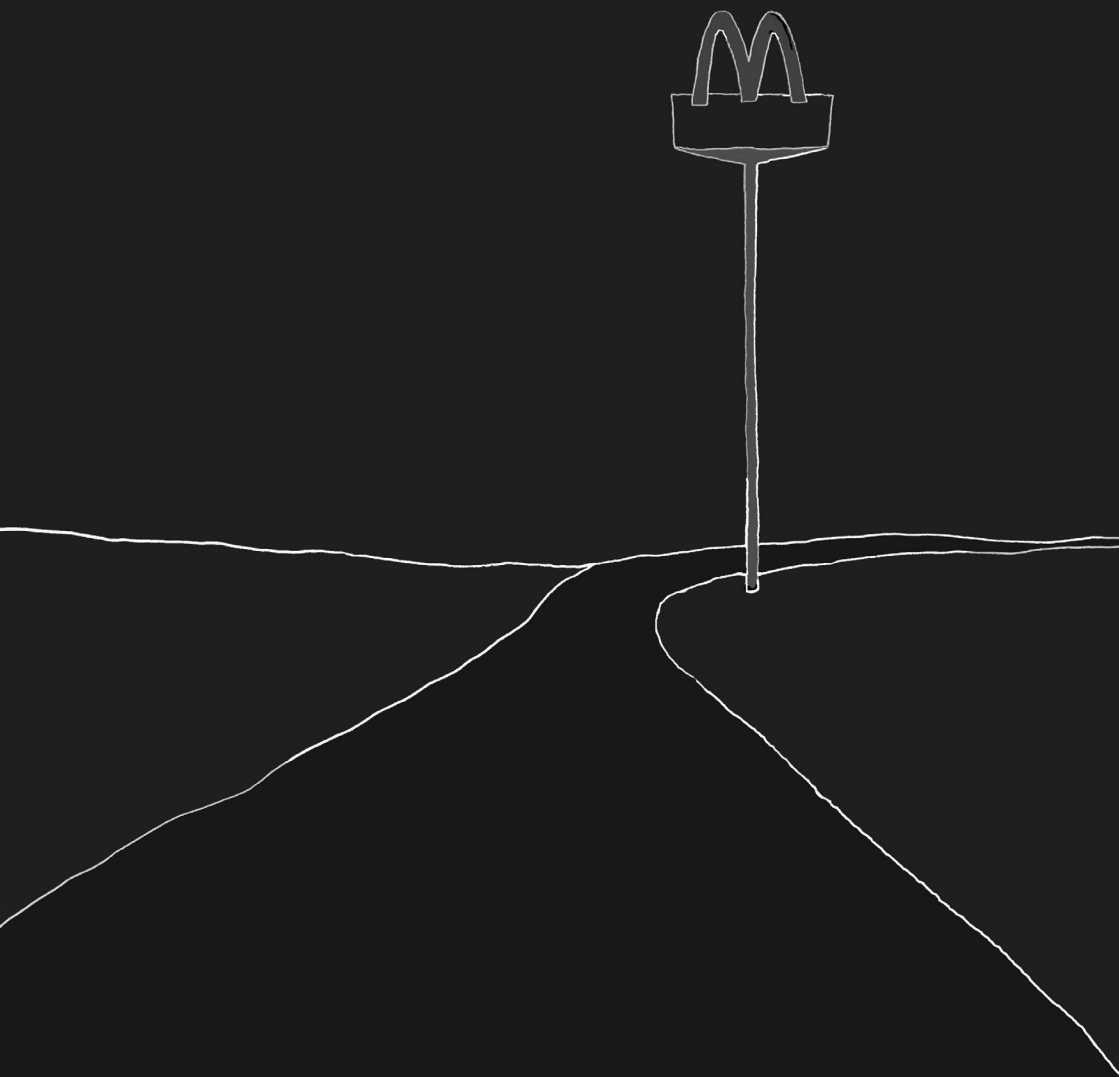
Annabelle stood up and made her way to the door, thirty pairs of eyes watching her in silence. That silence was broken suddenly by a loud whisper from the middle row.

'What's she going for a career in? Being a slut?'

Annabelle stopped as laughter rippled throughout the classroom. We did not yet understand the seriousness of that word: a whole arsenal of weaponry against women contained in four little letters. A weapon we'd now turned on ourselves.

'Now, girls,' said Mr Goodwin, 'I don't think that's appropriate, do you?' Silence fell once more, and Annabelle was gone. For the rest of our time at school she never shook off that word and its connotations. Words stick.

I thumbed through *Great Expectations* and found the bus ticket marking where I'd left off. Pip was now an established gentleman in London, although Joe Gargery had made the journey from Kent to pay an awkward and unappreciated visit. I watched Pip lament that it is a terrible thing to become ashamed of one's home. How terrible it is to hate where you come from and who you are. The irony of this was lost on me at the time. The basis of all the careers advice we were given had simply been: get yourself out of here if you can. I got that message but didn't get what it meant: get out of here. A decade and two English degrees at the other end of the country later, and I do know what it meant. I got out. And now, like Pip, I can never go back.





Anon

Scum – *n.* **1.** A layer of impure matter that forms on a surface of a liquid ... **5.** a worthless person or group of people.

I arrived late at the McDonald's on Bury New Road, my T-shirt damp with sweat from cycling up the hill. All the decent spots to lock my bike were taken so I crossed the road. I felt nervous. I always do at protests. I feel it in my gut mostly, like the first day of school.

It was the day before the 2019 European elections and three years after the Brexit referendum. Tommy Robinson was standing as a candidate in England's north-west region. The former leader of the English Defence League (EDL) and notorious Islamophobe, Robinson is the most well-known figure on the British far right. From its chaotic launch on an estate in south Manchester a month earlier, today's rally in Salford was the final date on his tour.

Back at the McDonald's a Momentum activist handed out huge red flags on long wooden poles. I had decided to tag along with some other folks. I got the sense that like me, most people were not local to Lower Broughton but had come over from south Manchester. So I felt self-conscious as we set off down the road, a dozen or so flags billowing above us like something from the Paris Commune.

We passed the leisure centre where several staff stood on the steps watching us go by. I searched their faces but they gave nothing away. I'm not sure what it was I was looking for exactly. They reminded me of my colleagues at the leisure centre where I was working at the time. I tried to imagine what they would think about it all, about me, about my politics.

Further on a young girl with plaited hair watched us through thick-lensed glasses. Then another girl was running, weaving between us to catch up with a friend. 'They're coming around the corner', she shouted excitedly. We passed them on the next street whispering into each other's ears between bouts of laughter.

We followed the main road as it curved down the hill. A comrade with a fashionable bowl-cut stopped to talk to three women

assembled on their front lawn. The women asked what the protest was about. The activist responded using language that reminded me of university debates, of dinner talk in middle-class homes with gravel drives.

It is a world in which I have learnt to pass and as I listened I wondered to what extent in passing as middle-class I have become middle-class. I was the scholarship kid at a private school. I internalised middle-class tastes and traits, their language and maybe unconsciously, some of their values partly in order to survive. As I listened I wondered what it would take to unlearn these. Perhaps, I thought, my comrade is in the same boat, perhaps I am just reading her in the same way that people read me.

I grew up poor and queer in a rural area in a single-parent family on and off welfare. My Mum didn't get much from the divorce except a video player the size of a suitcase. My father moved overseas which meant the child support agency didn't chase him for maintenance payments. I shared a room with my brother before he moved out to a flat on the estate with his girlfriend and my niece.

In the negative equity crisis of the 1990s my Mum's two-up-two-down was sold for next to nothing to pay off her debts. Facing homelessness she got a job as a live-in housekeeper on a dairy farm where I later moved after some time in a bedsit. When I wasn't working I spent weekends at the houses of my friends from school, a mansion in one case.

I got a full means-tested grant to go to university in the last year they existed. The farmer was abusive towards my Mum and one morning we packed our things into the car and drove off, not really knowing where we were going. The car broke down and so did my mother. I became her carer for a long while after that.

I have this strange dual experience of privilege and precarity that feels impossible to fit into the standard categories, the shorthands that we use to talk about class and poverty. So these and other experiences remain hidden even from my closest friends, not to mention the folks I organise with.

A thumping sound distracted me. I steeled myself to look, half-expecting abuse. But the guy pounding on the back window of a passing car gave us the thumbs-up. 'Fuck Tommy Robinson', he shouted out of the driver's window. We left the three women on their lawn.

A throng spilled into the street outside a pub snarling up the traffic. The crackle of a soundsystem ricocheted off the houses. Opposite the pub a crowd of three to four hundred people were gathered in front of a flatbed van that served as the stage. Behind it a large screen displayed the broad grin of Tommy Robinson.

The site was a car park at the back of a crumbling shopping arcade barely a mile from the fancy shopping districts of Manchester city centre. 'Mocha Parade' is an architectural experiment from the 1970s. Two or three shop units are still in use, but the others are long since boarded up. Several onlookers were positioned on skeletal staircases descending from the external walkway running the length of the building.

The police marshalled our group to the back of the crowd where we joined the counter-protest. I recognised a few people. Judging from the banners and identikit placards it was mostly made up of unions and Stand Up to Racism activists. A large banner read 'Manchester against fascists'. A cordon of police officers separated us from the rear of the Robinson rally.

It was difficult to judge the crowd who were gathered in front of the stage. Undoubtedly a core of people sympathised with the

politics of Tommy Robinson. But it felt like many were locals off the neighbouring estate rather than committed far-right types. In an area that receives almost zero attention, it was as if some people were there to check out the circus that had set up on their doorstep.

Anne-Marie Waters kicked off proceedings. That's when the chanting from our side started. 'Tommy wears a milkshake', referring to the dousings Robinson received on the campaign trail. This was followed by others in quick succession, 'Refugees are welcome here' and 'Fuck off back to Luton'.

When a black-shirted Robinson took to the stage, another chant went up, 'Nazi scum! 'Nazi scum!' then simply 'Scum! Scum! Scum!' shouted over and over, increasing in volume as our side attempted to drown out his speech. Whilst directed at Robinson, the chant fell mostly on those milling around at the back of the rally. Robinson spoke for around twenty minutes at one point inviting a young fan to the stage.

When the adrenaline of that day faded from my body I was left with an uncomfortable feeling. It was somehow linked to that word, scum. I've heard it used many times in the call-and-response chants that are standard at protests like these. The feeling I have is a kind of ambivalence. On the one hand, how else do we name the politics of Tommy Robinson? On the other hand, when I hear activists with class privilege use the word, something grates.

As I write this I'm aware that the complexities of that day are difficult to describe without sounding like an apologist for far-right sympathisers. The same complexities are even more difficult to translate into strategies for countering the far right. Most anti-fascist groups recognise the need to combine no-platforming with community-level work. But when a young woman came over asking what we were about, no one made much of an effort to

talk to her. Imperceptibly a collective decision had been made that anyone local was to be mistrusted.

In his book, *Chavs: the Demonization of the Working Class*,¹ Owen Jones dissects the classism of the media and wider political establishment. There is one page where he mentions the classist attitudes of ‘liberals’ but the left is otherwise spared. In my experience of activism, of left and autonomous movements, this feels like an omission. Not least for the ways class privilege shapes who gets involved in these movements and whose voices get heard. This is often reinforced by other forms of privilege around gender, race, sexuality, and disability, as many folks have pointed out. Perhaps I wouldn’t feel so uncomfortable about the use of the word scum if it didn’t feel like the symptom of a wider problem in our movements?

As someone who has acquired class privilege through education I can’t really speak for working class experiences of activist spaces today. The outsidership I experience tends to relate to a combination of being queer and having a precarious economic background; that is, not having a stable family home or the bank of Mum and Dad to fall back on.

From this position I have noticed the ways people from class-privileged backgrounds can tend to dominate space or take leadership roles, including in ‘non-hierarchical’ groups. Sometimes this is to do with what kind of knowledge has most currency in these spaces. I am into talking theory, ideology and activist histories but this kind of knowledge often takes precedence over actual day-to-day experiences of oppression, including poverty. Sharing those experiences and the emotions they bring up is systematically devalued and often not considered part of activism. This is also partly to do with the kind of masculinity that activist

1 Jones, O. (2011). *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, London: Verso p116.

scenes, particularly anti-fascist organising, tends to foster.

Activist spaces can feel sub-cultural and unwelcoming to people who aren't already integrated into the scene, which often relies on informal networks. Oftentimes a sense of belonging in social change scenes is unconsciously organised around the shared experience of people who have voluntarily decided to reject dominant heteronormative capitalist values and bond with each other around the 'sacrifice' this represents. If you were already marginalised by that system it can feel like you have walked in on a cult.

There is a lot of tacit knowledge that comes from being socialised in these scenes, for example to do with digital security or knowing particular activists. Legitimate concerns around infiltration and group security can feed into this. But folks from outside can often face judgment for not already knowing it all. Often it feels like this dynamic is classed, and yet class differences within groups and the ways they might influence the ability of people to participate are rarely talked about. Which brings me back to that day in Salford.

When Robinson's speech was over, the tension escalated. With their attention no longer drawn by the stage, the crowd's focus turned on the counter-protest. After some indecision, we relocated to the car park at the front of the shopping arcade. Some people left in cars but our exits were gradually blocked by a crowd that had encircled us.

A three-person crew from Breitbart News appeared asking for interviews but someone chucked a milkshake over them. Then something hit the ground, a smear of yellow. I looked down to see an egg yolk oozing across the tarmac. More came, raining down on the union leaders as they tried to deliver their standard speeches. As the situation fell apart, an argument developed between different factions until it was simply a bunch of men shouting at each other.

Fearing a riot, it was left to the police to clear an exit. The organisers of the counter-protest wanted to march to the city centre, but on leaving the car park the only route available led further into the estate. We were tailed by kids throwing stones. One guy was hit on the head, blood streaming down his face as others came to his aid. An elderly man berated us from his doorstep. At the window of a new-build a young couple holding a baby waved to us and smiled. Eventually we reached Bury New Road where buses arrived to ferry the protesters away and I returned to my bike.

At the election count the next evening Tommy Robinson lost his deposit. The Brexit Party were the biggest winners on a regional turnout of 33% of registered voters. By some accounts², the campaign against Tommy Robinson was a success. But the counter-protest in Lower Broughton left me with questions. When challenging the racism of the far right is it possible to express other forms of prejudice that undermine our efforts? By using classist language, do the arguments of the left become easier to ignore and dismiss? Does this reflect a wider problem around class in our movements?

In a local news report³ I read that the police had arrested two young people from the estate that day. As the pair were handcuffed and taken away, the crowd were heard to be shouting 'scum' at the officers. Maybe it is a coincidence they chose that word. But it is difficult not to hear an echo of the chants we directed at them earlier that day.

2 Lowles, N. (2019). "Tommy Robinson was humiliated in the EU elections. Here's how we helped do it" in *The Guardian* 28th May 2019

3 Robson, S. (2019). "Two people arrested after clashes and chaotic scenes at Tommy Robinson rally in Salford" in *The Manchester Evening Post* 23rd May 2019

THE FACEHUGGER

Michael Jarvie

It's early June 2020 and the initial wave of COVID-19 has subsided, leaving 40,000 corpses in its wake – as many as died during the Blitz. In readiness for the second wave, I eventually get my hands on some disposable masks from Lundybright, via Fuyang City in the People's Republic of China. I've already bought a cheap digital thermometer and check my underarm temperature every day. Once the beeping stops, it's a relief to know that a reading of 35.9°C is perfectly normal for someone my age.

Because of the overwhelming shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, that mouthpiece of the government, the BBC, has been advising the public to make their own face coverings. It all smacks of rank amateurism to me, a Dad's Army mentality, a state of mind that admittedly appeals to the jingoistic flag-shaggers amongst the general population. To take adequate precautions in the face of a deadly pandemic is what you'd expect from any half-competent government, but the useless Tory fuckers in charge couldn't organise a funeral in a morgue.

Thankfully, I'm no longer a wage slave. In fact, I'm a man of leisure now. When the bosses tried to force me back into the office, after a successful period of working from home, I said no. I'm sixty two years old and if you think I'm going to put my life at risk, you're very much mistaken. Like Peter Finch's character in *Network*, there's only so far you can push me before I explode. Instead of "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore," my rallying cry is "Fuck wage slavery, fuck capitalism, and fuck the Student Loans Company". I therefore write a perfunctory email of resignation and hand in my security pass. It's actually the third job I've walked out of.

Now I'm just going to hunker down and wait for the state pension to materialise in four years' time. In the interim, my income nosedives from a healthy £1,510 a month to a paltry £110 cobbled together from three company pension schemes: Royal Mail, Capita, and the Civil Service. So what? I'll survive on fresh air plus any infrequent proofreading and editing jobs I can obtain, because I'm certainly not signing on. Fuck that for a game of soldiers.

Unfortunately, the problem with being a working-class writer, looking for paid work, is that I have no business connections whatsoever – I'm adrift in an ocean of the middle class, with whom I have very little in common. The writing world is located in an exclusive tourist resort called, Middle Class-on-Sea, full of pretty white chalets. The patrons of this enclave operate like a body of ruthless freemasons, allocating work only to fellow masons, and woe betide if you're not part of their old boy's network because they will shun you as if you were infected with the plague.

Despite my financially precarious position, it's a liberating feeling not having to go to work ever again; I'm like a prisoner at the end of his stretch. Launching myself out of bed in the morning – no dallying for me – I trot downstairs to the kitchen to make breakfast, punching the air at the thought of being free while I wait for the toast to pop.

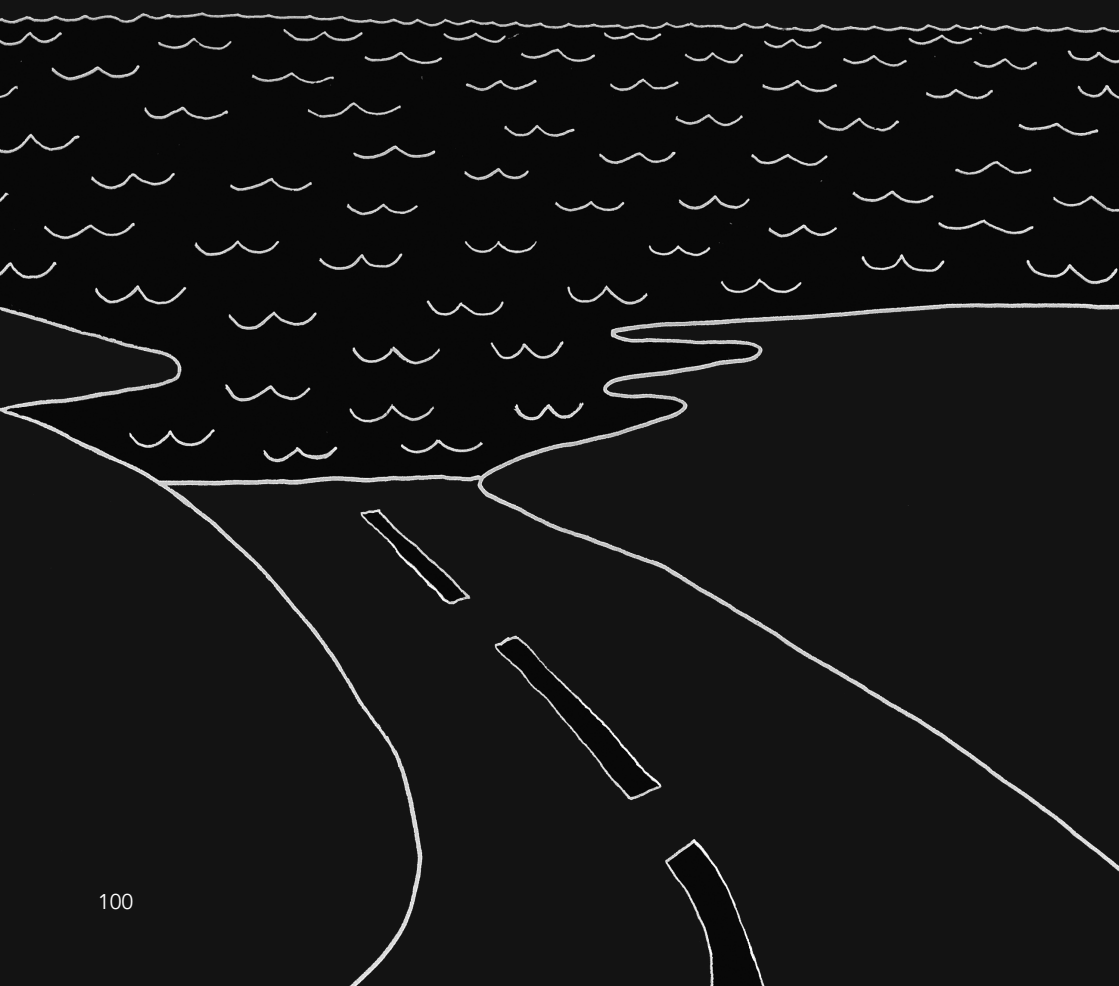
When the Amazon delivery arrives I open the box to inspect my pack of 50 masks. However, before I even tear open the plastic wrapper, I'm already wondering what precautions they have taken during manufacture to ensure that the masks themselves are safe to use and free from any contamination. Did the production operatives on the assembly line wear masks during the manufacturing process? Did they sanitise their hands? The more I think about it, the more convoluted it all becomes – like taking apart a Russian doll. We are ultimately dependent on masks sent from China to combat a virus that originated in China. It's hardly reassuring.

There are no instructions provided, so I have to check the photograph on the packaging in order to avoid the embarrassing situation of putting it on back to front. Once I've established that the blue material faces outwards, I locate the wire that needs to be sculpted around my nose to ensure a snug fit. I try one out before I go shopping. It's a faff all right, but worth it in the long run. No dumb virus is going to kill me, that's for sure.

By now social media is awash with conspiracy theories, the overwhelming majority of them peddled by the usual right-wing suspects. The 5G network has caused the virus. Wearing a mask will decrease your oxygen supply, and perhaps even inhibit your sexual potency. Masking up is only for pansies. To wear a mask is to insult God, since He ultimately decides who lives or dies, not you. These wild ideas are propagated by an unholy alliance of science deniers and Christian fundamentalists, many of them spawned in the USA, and some of them originating from the mouth of the waddling Trumposaurus himself as he spews forth his daily torrent of gibberish.

With a final adjustment to the mask and with a bottle of hand cleanser in my jacket pocket, I lock the door and make for the supermarket. Now I know how poor Kane felt in Alien with the facehugger clamped in position. This analogy is even more thought provoking when I recall how that unfortunate individual even underwent intubation as the parasite fed him oxygen to keep him alive, before the impregnated xenomorph burst out of his chest. Unlike Kane, blindfolded by the creature's body, I am at least able to see where I am going, despite my spectacles fogging up every so often. Luckily, on my way through the woods to Asda, I see no aliens lurking behind any of the trees.





Stuck on the Ladder: On Class and Dreams

Kylie Noble

The thing about being working class is that you often feel incredibly uncomfortable with the notion of poverty—you may live in it, on the edge of it, or barely above it, but you know it could be a lot worse. You want to believe you have it better than you do.

A lot of the middle class, the media, and the political elite agree that we are poor, but many believe it to be through our own fault or lack of ambition. It is not a good or respectable thing in society to be. Yet, we feel a perhaps misplaced pride in *being* working class. I guess when you're at the bottom, and not knowing how long you'll be there, potentially forever, you need to tell yourself there is something virtuous in the draining life you lead, or you'd fully lose your mind.

Am I poor? I suppose I am, rather; for the past six months, since finishing a postgraduate university course, I am living a precarious, low-wage, multiple job life. My only set income is a bit over £700 a month from a twenty-four-hour, part-time customer service job. About £410 of that goes to my monthly rent and bills. I try to supplement this income via my ad hoc freelance journalism and a zero-hour waitressing job (in which I've only made £300 in five months). I've recently taken on another zero-hour contract, which operates across several venues as opposed to one, so there should be more work. My main job consists of shift work, and the patterns change weekly. This makes getting another, more sustainable second job impossible. I make about 10k a year.

I realise, placing my position in life on a global spectrum, that I am a heck of a lot more privileged than many. I do not live in absolute poverty, but relative. I am highly-educated and live in one of the richest nations on earth. Yet, that's what riles me too—do I not deserve better?

This is the chief lesson gleaned from this period of my life, which I like to call the 'transition' stage (to remain as positive as possible); life is not fair and social mobility is a lot harder to achieve than I used to naively think.

Last week, I met up with my housemates from my final year at Queen's University Belfast. It was our first time reunited since our days of living in a beautiful flat on Malone Avenue. Back then, I was so full of hope and drive. I spent my final year not doing enough university work and throwing myself into the student newspaper, which I had dreamed of editing since seventeen. I had been doing journalism since age sixteen and had written for local and regional newspapers, alongside being a semi-regular freelance commentator for the BBC on student issues. I had completed a work placement in broadcast media, and volunteered in PR. The summer after graduating, I was lucky to get a job as a communications development intern for a social enterprise in west Belfast.

It was in that flat, where I had screamed of joy upon hearing the news that I had been selected as one of six recipients of a prestigious Scott Trust bursary. This is a scheme run by The Guardian newspaper, aimed at those who cannot afford to train as a journalist, with the hope of helping them break into the media. I had my fees paid to study on one of the top journalism courses in the UK, at the University of Sheffield, and got £6000 to go towards my living costs. It seemed as if it would be the final, most important step to secure a dream I had since fourteen.

Except it wasn't, or at least, isn't so far. This doesn't mean I'm not grateful, but rather it shows how hard it can be for working-class people to make it in the industry.

My friends are doing well and I am so proud of them. One is working as an editor for a big brand publisher in London and the other is teaching English to immigrant adults and children in Belfast. But as I parted ways, I couldn't help but feel a bit sad. I am far from where I hoped to be when we all lived together, almost two years ago, on the cusp of adulthood and 'the real world—I wondered, when will I get my break? When we next meet up, will I too be able to talk about a rewarding career in which I have financial stability?

Perhaps my class is not the biggest barrier, but rather, my geographical location. I purposefully chose to train in England as that's where the most jobs are. Before leaving for Sheffield, my plan was to stay in England for several years at least. To begin my career there. But it was a tough year. I missed Belfast lots. I lived in a house I did not feel at home in. I struggled with going from a city where I would on average see five people I know a day, to knowing no one, and struggled financially too. I had friends but nothing close to the tight networks in Belfast. My scholarship helped so much, but it didn't last the whole year. By April, and just after my twenty-second birthday, I was newly dumped in a sudden manner from my first relationship, completely broke, and having to take on two jobs. Many times, I almost visited food banks (something I've come close to several times since moving home too). I at times borrowed money from friends and family and put great strain on the latter.

I was a wreck near the end of my time in England, and my mental health was the lowest it has ever been. I used to randomly burst into tears when walking down a street or eating cereal. One morning, a friend from Belfast, now living in Spain, had to coax me out of bed over Facebook chat. England had become foremost all my sad and bad memories that were tied to it. I knew I needed to go home.

Coming into Dublin harbour, in August 2016, I felt a high unlike any I have ever felt. It had been five lonely, poor, and hard months since I had last been in Ireland (with my ex, a week before he dumped me). When coming off the boat, I knocked my suitcase into a woman by accident and she laughed and started chatting. On the bus into Dublin city centre, a stranger from Co. Clare struck up a conversation with me out of the blue. When I arrived at the bus depot, I got chatting to a drunk GAA fan from Co. Donegal and an older woman from Newry who had been up to see an art exhibit. I had talked to more strangers in a few hours than I'd done in eleven months in England; it felt like the universe was telling me that my gut was right, that choosing head over heart could be a wise choice.

Several weeks later, on the dole, I knew that it wasn't a wise decision for my career. I wasn't on Jobseekers long but found it incredibly depressing. I got the first job I applied for and moved with enthusiasm back to Belfast; too long in Co. Fermanagh drives me a bit mad. Eighteen years of the countryside is more than enough.

My mother had been angry at me for moving back to Northern Ireland ('here's no jobs, no opportunity') and angry that my life had come to this. What was the point, she asked, of school, of university, of two degrees? My parents had left school at fifteen, the youngest of working class families of thirteen and eleven. They wanted us all to go to university, because it represented a life so far from theirs, which consists of hard work for little reward. My dad is past retirement age but still works on his small farm. My mum works three cleaning jobs. I was the only one of us three kids to stay at school to eighteen. I was the only one to go to university.

They, and I, had expected that education would be the magic ticket to a better life. And I still hope for this, even though the payoff is currently delayed. I used to think going to university made

you middle-class but rather it makes it much more likely you will eventually get there. It is not automatic. However, my education gives me cultural capital. I am only entering my seventh month of barely scraping by— there are people who live years like this and many who never live any other way. My education gives me a bigger chance of making it out.

It was after crying alone in a pub drinking Guinness that I made myself go to counselling for the first time. I had a month or so of being thrilled to be back in Belfast, but by mid-November I felt consumed by a sense of failure, that it was my fault that I was under-employed. For weeks, I went through a cycle of feeling okay for half the week and then plunging into depression for the other half. My sessions with Lifeline helped me to stop going over my past in England, and to see a mixture of luck and determination had been key to overcoming barriers in the past.

I have stayed in my main part-time job as it's a social media customer service role, in a media-aligned organisation. I had hoped I would have secured a more directly relevant full-time job by now; it is a temporary contract and finishes at the end of this month. It's likely the contract will be renewed but the hours could be less, and even if not, I don't think I can withstand working part-time for much longer.

My diet, mental health and physical health all suffer. I eat a lot of rubbishy ready-meals and go to Greggs far too much, but in my precarious life, food is my main source of short-term joy. I could save a bit more money by eating better, but I'd lose my quick-fix happy feeling. Just this evening, I bought chocolate. I don't really need it, but it gives me a quick rush, a brief feeling of escape from my worries.

I don't drive. I was trying to learn but realised I couldn't really afford to. I'm putting it off now, until I have more income. I walk

most places and try to keep my bus and taxi trips to a minimum. Lots of walking is good because I can't afford to join a gym. The local library has become a haven. My income can't justify buying new books often, so I buy now and again from charity shops, but it costs only 50p to order a book into the library, which is at the end of my street.

Reading and learning take on new meaning. As my work is largely menial, my brain yearns for stimulation and knowledge in a way I've not experienced since childhood. Reading lets me, as then, enter other worlds, lets me travel to other places—I can't afford to go on holiday, at least a real one. I visited friends in Doncaster in winter.

My top goal when I moved home was to get a media job, but now it's to get, first off, *some kind* of full-time job. There simply aren't many jobs. I've seen about three entry-level journalism jobs since moving home and not that much more entry-level communication jobs. It's likely I will end up in a field separate to what I would ideally like to be in, and could be in it for some time, but being picky about what kind of work you do is a luxury not afforded to the working class. As an idealistic undergrad, I was horrified about the prospect of working in a bank, but as a desperate graduate, it was one of the jobs I applied for.

There is also the problem of being over-qualified. This week I had five job interviews—the zero-hour gig, full time at a pub, in a different team at my current work, at a care home, and as a communications officer for a charity. I have two CVs. One has a lot of things removed, as I think for a lot of lower-paid jobs, too much ambition is viewed in a negative light. This was proven at the pub interview, where my postgraduate course was raised as a concern. I was asked if this job would be a stop, and how long could they expect to have me.

I know if I moved back to Britain, I could quite easily get a job in communications or journalism. But the very ability to move is a class issue. I had to borrow £1,000 from my local Credit Union to be able to move back to Belfast. I need to pay this off, and an overdue student overdraft, alongside my regular bills. I don't want to attempt moving without enough money saved up to be able to do it without worrying if I can get by.

So, for now, it's beautiful and broken Northern Ireland. Despite my financial woes, I am not entirely unhappy. I am close to family and friends, and the arts and books give me a lot of joy. The experience has made me more entrenched in my anti-capitalist and generally left-wing beliefs, and reinforced the need for activism and solidarity. My situation is not unique, many friends have gone through it or are going through it. Perhaps by next week, I'll have a full-time job. Perhaps, it will be another six months of this life.

We are all free to dream, but our starting points aren't equal. To be working-class is likely to involve sacrificing your dreams for stability—for a period, or perhaps for good. Yet, my dreams have carried me to places far beyond my station. I trust they will again, even if I'm stuck on this rung, halfway up the ladder, for some time.



Community Care

David Francis

I can hear them outside ringing the doorbell, ringing my mobile, texting me, shouting through the letterbox, banging on the window, even though I'm actually still asleep and I don't need to answer the door when I'm having an episode of depression because my doctor said I need to rest and look after number one.

There's two of them and I don't know the other one and they know I get social anxiety with new people coming into my home because I put it on my referral form. So that's fucked up. I don't even know why they're here. They don't help.

They're supposed to help, but all they do is an assessment visit and then write to the council saying that I was making myself intentionally homeless, for refusing to engage with them. Which is a fucking joke. The first time I didn't know they were coming and so I was out looking for work, which is what they told me to do. The second time I waited in all day but they never turned up because they'd put the wrong time on the letter.

He comes with me to the pharmacy to pick up my Subutex and he acts all hard when we come out and I meet my friends outside, like he's my boyfriend or something. He always smiles at the Chinese girl behind the counter in the pharmacy and rolls his eyes as if I had learning disabilities and he obviously fancies her. It's embarrassing; makes me feel sick. The guy is a creep.

He makes me get my money out from the cash point while he's there. Makes me pay my rent in at the post office and then I have to go in his car to the supermarket and buy a load of ready meals. I have to get my cheap tobacco from the dodgy shop, because that's what they'd put in my weekly budget. That can't be right: they're working for the government social services and they make me do something that is technically illegal just because I don't get enough money to buy proper legal tobacco.

He even bought tobacco for himself while we were there and he knew the name of that dirty fucker who works there and he chatted to him. That did not impress me. If he hadn't been there obviously as my support worker, that guy in the shop would have asked me to have sex with him and his friends, because he's done it before so my actual social worker making out he's mates with him is not going to gain my trust, is it? Highly unprofessional. I should raise it as a safeguarding issue.

I'm sure he means well and he's trying to do his job, he seems like a nice guy and he's caring and quite good-looking, but he already has a wife because he told me they went on their honeymoon to Cyprus, which is where my seriously fucked up family who won't have anything to do with me anymore come from.

To be honest I'd rather die than let them two cunts in and I'd rather go back to being homeless than live in this dirty disgusting flat and have paedo social workers and housing officers and floating support workers and that posh noncy old landlord coming in when I'm trying to sleep.

I'd rather be with people I know. It's not like anyone gives a fuck anyway.

They'll shut up and fuck off soon and go to their next appointment because they're always going on about their massive caseload, how little time they have to do their job properly and how stressed they are, as if I need to know, as if I give an actual fuck.



Illustration credit: David Francis



Venus over Windsor, credit to Scott McKendry.



Obit

Scott McKendry

When he scored a screamer, they said it was a fluke,
that he got on 'cause his da was the manager.
Trials for Burnley? An utter anomaly,
the scout was on the take

or on something. He had a knobbly head

after ten men beat him –
his coupon – purple-yellow – looked like a turnip.
'Haven't wrote a poem since', he declared to his wife
and solicitor who, in stitches, slapped the table

– we all did –

and rolled about the floor.
Reposing tomorrow from 4 at Flannigans'.
Removal on Monday to St Michael's around 10ish,
followed by cremation at Roselawn –

what a shame – then sausage rolls and pints after.



Perspective

Kenya Sterling

I.

Diet culture

We're in a dying culture

Derived from our perspective

Depth of our eyes

Body disrespected

Inspect it

Skin in which

You lie

Surprised to find fat molecules appreciated

From another's

Eyes

II

Skin in which you lie

Find yourself deprived

Ribs in which to hide

Family splitting

Divide

Getting to your goal weight

Against

Doctors' debates

Change of pace

Against

Beauty queens and makeup ads

Find yourself

Trapped in a

Rat Race.



III

Built up bulimia.

Flushing away lies they've been feeding ya

Two fingers to the back of the throat.

Slamming doors.

Shut

Don't

Choke.

Relieve the

Skin in which you lie

Empty stomach

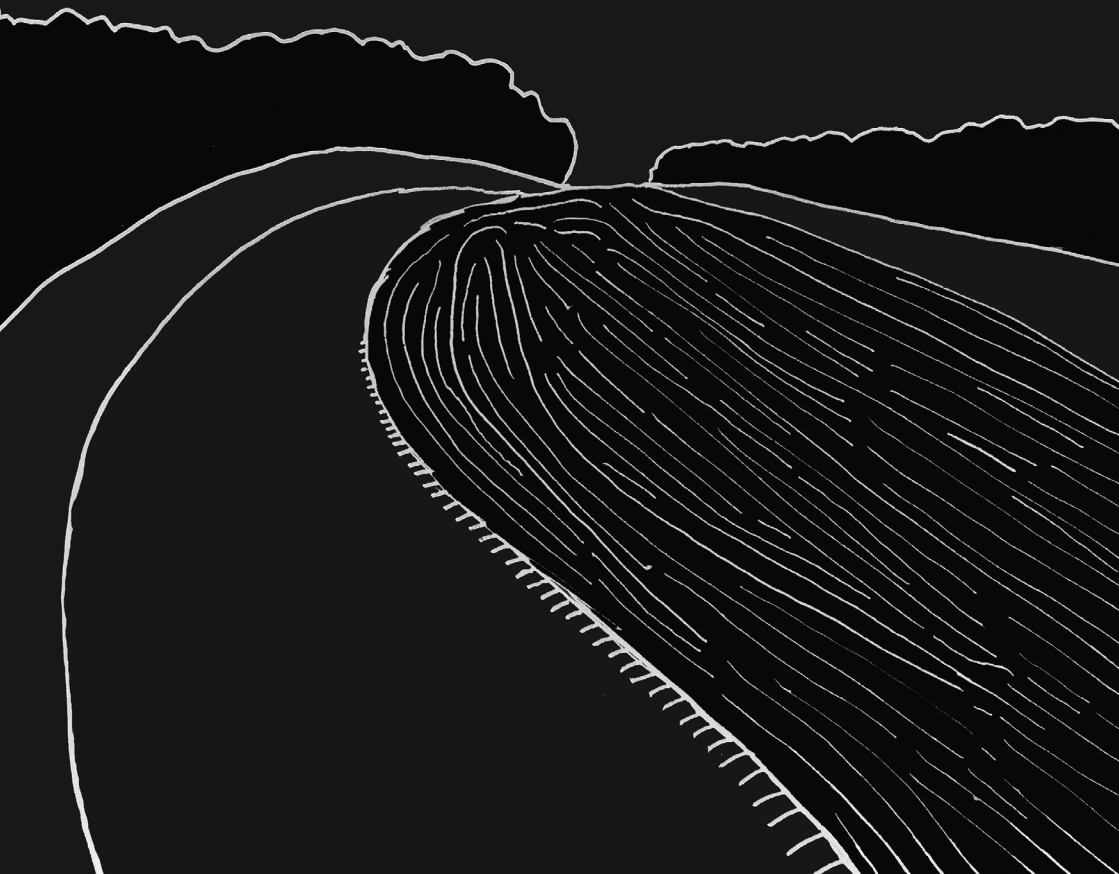
Disguise

Break down barriers

Rewind

Before mind found weakness in sight





Take a Man

Laura Jane Round

From downtown alleys where horses clip by
And muggy alcoves by the cut
Feel the smoothness of the palms in your hands
And take him to work.

Take a man to bed
And he will say things between the sheets
He cannot say in the cold day
When he becomes a ringleader again
Feel the softness of the belly bared to you,
And take him to rest.

Take a man to the taverns
Where the sun shines on the lake
Get him drunk, tell him stories
About camps and netting and surrounding
Loneliness growing with each passing tiny set of feet
With fool's gold and curious trickling mystique
And take him to memory lane.

And he will breathe brick dust in his lungs
And feel canal water in his veins
And he may drink to his oblivion
Or stumble home with a wife
As they choose
Without any particular forethought.
They will take a man.

My Reprieve From Corporate Hell

Deenah al-Aqsa

Last year, I was laid off from my corporate job in the oil and gas industry and my immediate reaction was a huge sigh of relief.

In fact, I was weirdly nice to my employers about it. I asked after my soon-to-be former manager's wellbeing—we were still in the beginning stages of a raging pandemic, after all. Doing so certainly threw her off in our video call, as she probably expected me to be upset or angry. But she recovered quickly from the surprise, assured me she was doing fine and even thanked me for being so professional and considerate. She then went on and terminated my employment but all things considered, it was on relatively good terms.

In truth, that wasn't my *professionalism* talking, nor my goodwill. More than anything, I was happy—that along with my thankless job, my pretences in supporting an industry built on capitalism and amorality could also be dropped.

Working in the oil and gas industry was never my ideal job, and a job in the corporate world—even less so. It's not just because once I started working with clients I saw they were nothing more than entitled fat cats in smoke-filled rooms, though that was part of it. It was also because I felt out of place—even more so than usual, considering I'm a visibly Muslim woman of colour and a closeted lesbian. This means that by default, I stick out like a sore thumb in most rooms already. Some of my labels are more obvious than others: my hijab definitively tells most people I'm Muslim, sure, but practically every stranger I meet assumes I'm straight.

While I'm in the closet when it comes to my sexuality, I make no secret of being an out-and-proud socialist. All my life, I've lived in some of the safest Labour seats in the country. Thus, for me, voting red is not just expected—it's hereditary. But my socialism goes beyond where Labour is currently, especially considering Keir Starmer's leadership. Politics for me is a matter of conscience. What is personal to me has always been political, and vice versa. In the era of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, loaded phrases like 'identity politics' and 'political correctness' have been normalised. Co-opted by even the mainstream, the right bemoans so-called the 'wokeness' they're beholden to when misgendering people, as well as expressing casual homophobia and racist rhetoric. In reality, not doing these things isn't about maintaining political correctness, but rather being a decent person—to the LGBTQ community, to people of colour, to working-class people and so on.

When in my case those demographics intersect, my awareness of that marginalisation increases too. So in my mind, that means being progressive in politics is not just an integral part of who I am, but a moral imperative—for me and for every community I belong to.

My blood boils when hearing about how little the Conservative government has done to help those most in need during the coronavirus recession, which has seen increased financial hardship for families, layoffs, and predictions of further cuts in the near future. Before I was made redundant, I often wondered if I was somehow complicit in this corrupt cycle by facilitating transactions between such companies.

Because of my job, my misgivings about corporations went further than merely those companies I buy from or give my data to. The corporations I saw in the news being bailed out by governments included clients I had done paperwork for or sent contracts to, like Shell, ExxonMobil, and Chevron. These are some of the biggest

names in oil and gas whose profits hinge on delaying or preventing action to stop climate change. If capitalism and corruption ever took a human form, it would be in these companies' CEOs.

At work, we would bend over backwards to meet various clients' demands, even when it was out of budget or impractical to do so. I was told that this was the service we had to provide to clients to keep them happy, that this was always our priority.

And because our clients compensated for their entitlement by signing more deals, thus lining my employer's pockets, we were able to hold numerous lavish social events in the office, with a sizable budget to match.

Conversely, even before the pandemic, the budget for charity work was tiny in comparison to others. These piecemeal contributions went to boroughs neighbouring our office, with high BAME populations and among the poorest in the country. As someone who grew up in one of those deprived boroughs, with no semblance of financial stability, that disparity angered me even more. What stung the most was that I saw the numbers for myself. I knew that we most definitely had that cash to spare.

Having clients exclusively in the fossil fuel industry meant that having a clear conscience was a rarity, if not an impossibility—if measured on the basis of our clients' business models. Expecting them to put the planet and its billions of inhabitants before their profits was always going to be a non-starter. Still, I felt like a hypocrite, going to work and pretending to be someone I was not—not because I wanted to, by any means, but because I had to.

No one ever said the words 'the client is always right' to me, but they never needed to. I knew in my mind that even if I personally didn't agree, I had to act like I did. If I didn't, I'd risk losing my job and thus a steady income and the comfort of knowing my rent and

bills were going to be paid. And so much of the time, this is the problem.

I couldn't express that a client was acting overly-entitled, intrusive, or sexist, or that they had made me uncomfortable like multiple clients had. Doing so would cost my employer their thousand- or million-dollar contract and, thus, my job. I felt like every fake smile I plastered on to appease a client became more and more strained, until I was counting the hours and minutes before the work day was over, so I could be myself again.

It's worth noting that I'm one of the lucky few who managed to escape, cushioned by a safety net made of savings I'd accrued only through this job in corporate hell. So, relatively speaking, my (hopefully) temporary unemployment doesn't hurt me too much. Therefore, I say this from a position of privilege. While jobless, I am not facing eviction or bailiffs for unpaid rent or bills—at least for now. That might change in the months to come if I am unable to find new employment, a predicament many others in the UK are also facing.

But having this time to reflect has been enlightening for me as I face a turning point in my life. Despite graduating from a Russell Group university with a 2:1 degree and work experience, I realised after the tenth rejection that I didn't have the privilege of being picky in attaining work. I came to understand when temping that I didn't choose my job; it chose me, and not in a fun, empowering way either. Rather, as a new graduate uncertain about my future and unable to get on grad schemes, I was stuck in the common catch-22 of not being able to get a job without experience, and not being able to gain experience without having a job.

A friend recommended temping when I had no success in attaining permanent positions, despite getting a few interviews. So my first jobs were temporary, without interviews and—in fairness—not

badly paid. I fell into the oil and gas industry almost by accident, starting off as a temporary cog in the machine and then a permanent one—or so I was told, until my redundancy some time later. When accepting the position initially, I tried to assuage the guilt I felt about working for such a company, telling myself it was only so I could get by, that it wouldn't be forever.

But while my colleagues read the headlines of plummeting oil prices with horror last year, especially when they dipped into minus figures for the first time in history, I was cheering for the first time in lockdown. I thought this might be the industry's demise at long last, that maybe that meant the planet actually had a chance after all. If my job had to go for that to happen, I was fine with it, because I knew the world was likely left a better place.

My job-hunt now has been equally difficult, perhaps even more so because this time around I am choosing to be picky. While I've realised that if I want to be happy I should do what I love (writing), figuring out how to get there and generate a steady income is tough. Not to mention the state of journalism as an industry—the layoffs I've heard of, for instance, and the fact that the opportunities out there have tended to be more in right-wing publications, or for a Tory government. And we live in a world where impartiality gets conflated with objectivity in mainstream media outlets like the BBC. I fear as I search for a new job that I might fall into the same trap, but I also wonder, often, if the ideological purity I strive for in my next job is even within reach.

My advice? If you're in a thankless job like I was, remember that your moral standing isn't just based on the company name on your payslip. People say that money isn't everything, but those people probably have too much of it to realise that unfortunately money is everything. Saying otherwise speaks volumes of your own privilege, and not everyone has the luxury of being ethical as an employee.

So go easy on yourself if you're stuck in a vicious, economically violent cycle of capitalism. There is no shame in only being able to see what is right in front of you—bills, rent, food—and continuing to muddle through by working for a company whose ethos is at odds with your own. We live under a Tory government that shamelessly values the economy more than human lives in the midst of a crisis (Eat Out to Help Out, anyone?). It's not your fault when you are inevitably caught in the middle. And ultimately you have to remember, this may be an era of renewed activism and rebellion, but it's also a time where you have to put yourself first. Even if that just means survival.

I want to remind you that if you don't have the financial privilege of doing what you love for work—or, like me, you've been made redundant from a job that you didn't love but at least paid your bills—your job is not the be-all and end-all of who you are. The face that you put on at work isn't necessarily indicative of your values, nor your self-worth. I know that's how family, friends and even fellow employees might make you feel—certainly, even when I was in a decent-paying job, it was 'lowly' clerical and secretarial work. When I told my family this, I felt their constant pressure to have a job title worthy of my mother bragging about to her friends, with a salary to match.

In an ideal world, I would write about all the things I love and care about, and I would be compensated—not even handsomely, just enough to keep myself afloat and comfortable. But the system is far from ideal for anyone right now, so even if I manage to make something of myself going freelance, the potential for me to get stuck in a similar contradiction because of financial necessity is very real. And I think it's important to remember if you are in that situation—whether you're in employment or are freelance, or a combination of both—that you are not the problem here; the system is.

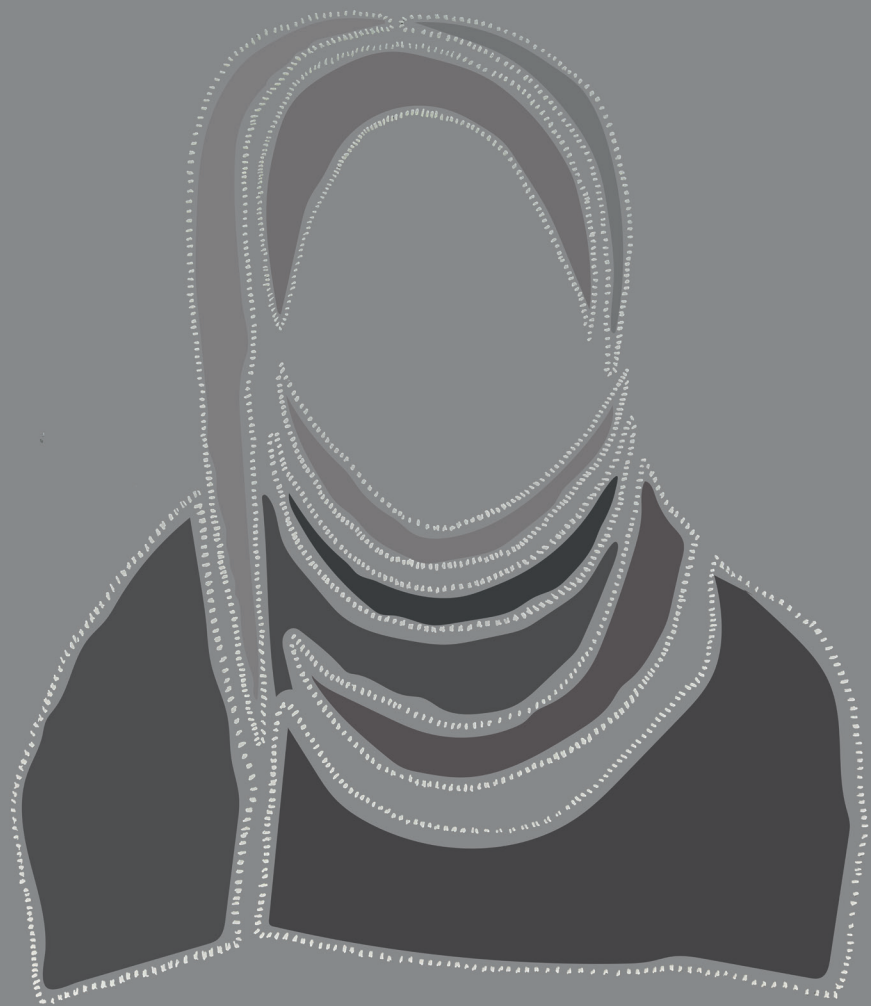
And if you feel this overwhelming need to take control of your destiny, it doesn't have to be through work. You can go back to your own values through activism, through simply starting conversations with the people around you in order to promote more progressive politics, through sharing progressive media outlets and publications.

Now I'm no longer tied to the fossil fuel industry, I feel freer to speak up about why its very existence is harmful. My redundancy empowered me in a way I did not expect, and my hope is that I can be driven not by sales or how to help minted CEOs hoard even more wealth, but rather to make a difference in the world around me.

By venturing out on my own, though, I'm without job security. My savings are finite. There's only so much soul-searching and job-searching that can be done, especially given the lack of respite in this economic depression. I wonder if I might ultimately settle on something eventually, if freelancing doesn't work out.

This time, though, rather than punishing myself for any ethical tensions that might come up, I will remind myself that I am not my job alone. My job title may say I continue to be an administrator, or an office assistant, or a temp. But before that I am a Muslim, a socialist, a lesbian, a working-class woman of colour.

Part of being empowered is choosing what defines me. What I can choose is to forge my own path, through the strength of my moral convictions, and the fire in my heart.



*LUM
PEN.*

How to Guide for Writing (With Us).



Here are 9 points you need to know:

1. We only accept writing from those who identify as working class or have experienced long term involuntary poverty and economic hardship.

2. We may accept writing of all length, but generally we look for anything between 2,000 and 4,000 words.

3. We accept all styles of writing - fiction, non-fiction and everything else.

4. For each issue we will suggest several themes and questions. If you want to write about something beyond these drop us an email as we might be planning a later issue that fits with it better.

5. If you've never written before or are lacking in confidence in your writing, get in touch. We can give support with your piece of writing, and devise different strategies with you to get your ideas out of your head onto the paper. For example one article for a future issue, will be a transcribed interview with a working class organiser.



Don't worry if you're not confident about spelling, grammar, sounding educated enough. What we're interested in is hearing your ideas based on your lived experiences.

6.

Concerned about style? Don't be, we're happy to publish openly angry rants written in stattco rhythm or fictional narratives about killer avocados on toast and everything else inbetween. Whatever voice you feel comfortable using.

7.

Please title your work, if you can't think of one we can help you find one.

8.

Name yourself as you would like to see it printed, or state if you would like to remain anonymous.

9.



Happy Writing!

Tips for worriers:

Don't know where to start? Start in the middle. Just try to get your ideas down on paper. It's all practice.

Redrafting is everything. If you don't like your first draft, that means you are ready to improve on your writing.

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