

DOPE

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"[...] I DO NOT HAVE TO ASK MYSELF WHICH SIDE I AM ON."
- GEORGE ORWELL

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"Intellectual property is a legally fabricated monopoly, confining culture and science, and violently depriving the poorest and most marginalised from access to critical resources. The fictions of copyright and patent are despotic attempts to monopolise the mind; outrageous constraints on intelligence and creativity; and a destructive protectionist scheme for the profit of power."



Photography

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club classics

By Dorothy Spencer

i walked out one evening
a saturday night
to what you might call
an entertainment district
the main drag
throbbing with queues to nightclubs
and expectant dicks
come the early hours
the streets will be
covered in broken bottles, vomit
blood and urine
but for now the
lipstick is red
and the heels have yet to blister.
i give a man on the pavement some change
stop to talk
i offer him some of my whisky, he refuses
he is the soberest man on the street
he's had four hip replacements
that his body keeps rejecting
he got sepsis
i was half-man half-abscess he says
watched my leg split open
all the way
like a pod of peas
they drained a pint of pus out of me a day
o god!
that's awful i say it's really
awful
i light a cigarette
smoke?
no don't smoke miss
then i think about how nearly all homeless men call
me miss
and nobody else does
spare any change miss, please miss, thanks miss,
i wish i had a bed miss, so i could take you back to it.
i wish they had beds too
i wish we all had beds in warm safe places
and i pray for world peace too
i'm hoping it'll arrive
on a raft of corpses on a sea of blood
la da dee, la dee da
la da dee, la dee da
and the nightclubbers walk by
they are thoroughly absorbed in their lives
they gossip, they flirt
they stagger like new-born foals,
clop-clopping while
grinding happiness between their teeth
in big gurning motions
but anyway i don't begrudge them that or
the drugs, and i wouldn't stop them
dancing if i could

play on
the sounds of redemption from
here to clapham to kingston to hownslow to harlow
and the music don't feel like it did
and the music don't feel like it did
i hope their sweat cleanses them
of their unknown sins
i hope they vomit in a way that is violent enough
to exorcise the week's disappointments
i hope they find something like love
on the dancefloor;
a stiff one against the back while dancing
come into my life
i got so much love to show you.
i hope that it's tender
though i fear it will be rough
i hope they have someone to hold their hair back
i hope their doubts
stay buried deep
i hope they don't come up along with the sambuca
and confront them from the toilet bowl screaming
do you think you're better off alone ?
do you think you're better off alone ?
i hope they look hot and i hope
their ex was there and has got fat
i hope they laugh with their stomachs and
feel alive in their guts
i hope they come up fucking screaming hosannas
or baby i'm yours
i hope it all ends well i hope it's all alright
i hope they never know
i hope they stay this way forever
while me and sepsis sit here and watch
and we laugh occasionally at it all
but with no abandon and it's cold, it's really cold
and i run out of things to say and so does he
and i go home i've got a bed and i lie in it
and i pull the covers right up
and dream of merry-go-rounds
where the horses bray
and gnash their teeth

Dorothy Spencer is a poet.
Taken from her collection See What Life is Like



A Violence that Liberates

Bender Defenders

Bender Defenders was started as a response to rising hate crime. This project has helped over 800 queer and trans people feel safer, more confident, more supported by a community. But not in the way it was originally intended to.

The original idea was for a roving group of trained queers who would challenge homophobes and transphobes and keep the streets safe for our community. It's a powerful fantasy, one that brings a lot of people to their first few classes. But, really, this fantasy came from a place of hurt, anger and fear – and that's not what Bender Defenders is about. We don't want to centre ourselves around other people's hate. We want to build queer community, queer joy and queer strength.

Our regular classes are a space where people can feel powerful, be vulnerable and realise how much they are capable of. In our self-defence workshops, we hold space for people to unpack this deeply flawed concept, understand its limitations and feel more confident in drawing on a range of skills – physical and non-physical – to keep themselves safe.

People say these classes are a huge boost to their mental and physical health and really help manage their anxiety. Learning Muay Thai is an amazing way to keep yourself safer, and to heal from the damage hate crime causes.

It's useful to have some moves in the back pocket in case you have no other option – any training is better than no training. Just as importantly, training a martial art, even casually, helps you understand the limits of what you can do, so that turning to non-physical approaches feels more like an empowering choice.

We also find ourselves frequently challenging three central myths around self-defence.

Firstly, if you really want to be able to fight, you need to rewire your brain's instinctive responses to violence and danger. One or two classes a week aren't going to cut it.

Secondly, engaging in physical violence is almost never the most effective way to keep yourself safe. And 'self-defence' doesn't give you a free pass to do whatever you want to someone who has wronged you – you need to understand the law before you start swinging.

Finally, learning how to defend yourself doesn't make the harm caused by a hate crime go away. There's no way to experience something like that and come out unscathed. Again, the fantasy of somehow 'coming out

on top' – whatever that might mean – is a powerful one, but a fantasy nonetheless. Like the original idea for Bender Defenders, it often comes from a place of hurt and anger. For us, part of learning self-defence is finding ways to heal from that.

Muay Thai helps us release our emotions, reconnect with our bodies on our own terms, and feel powerful in a world where many of us don't get that very often. Experiencing this week after week, alongside fellow queer and trans people, is transformative. It creates a strong, supportive community who love and believe in themselves and each other.

In fact, when our regulars talk about why they love Bender Defenders, the most common response isn't about hate crime or feeling safer or managing their health – it's that they found community here.

Ultimately that's what we want. We build community because we are stronger together than alone. Bender Defenders does challenge hate crime – just not how it was originally intended to.

Bender Defenders is a queer and trans community empowerment, Muay Thai and self-defence training movement.

benderdefenders.com

Left Hook

When we started Left Hook many years ago it had bit of a different aim than it has now. Initially we wanted to provide training exclusively to activists who were involved in activities that ran the risk of ending up in physical confrontation – anti-fascists and hunt saboteurs being the most common type. We knew a lot of venues wouldn't provide exactly the type of training that was needed, so we decided to try to create it ourselves.

It was something that was needed at the time and it helped a lot of people gain some confidence in the difficult situations they sometimes ended up. With time, however, priorities changed. We realised there were a lot of people that didn't go to more mainstream gyms for a variety of reasons. One of the biggest ones was lack of confidence and not feeling safe enough to try. We often have this idea in our heads that most places are full of cops, fascists and gym bros that listen to Jordan Peterson all day long. It's true that there is always an element like that around, but there are often far less of them than we initially think. But it takes a lot to make that first step and go into the gym, and some of us will never have enough courage to do it on our own.

This is when "leftist martial arts space" comes into play. In most cases we are not able to offer a straight up alternative to mainstream gyms. We lack facilities, full time instructors, and funds, to do it properly. There are, of course, projects that function this way in other countries (mainly in squatted buildings and long-term social centres) but most often this is not the case in the UK. What we can offer is a space where people build confidence. This is what we are aiming to do with Left Hook. We teach one class a week – mainly striking arts (Thai Boxing and Boxing) with occasional grappling/wrestling classes. We always aim to keep it simple and practical and stay away from fancy, "pure sport" type of techniques. As it's only once a week, this on its own is not really enough to become a great athlete, but it's a start. Apart from building a little community that trains together, we are aiming to equip people with enough skill and confidence that they can then move on and get more training in one of the many gyms available in our city.

For many people that train with us, this was their first taste of any combat sport, and they probably wouldn't have tried otherwise. After a while, though, those that want to train more often start looking at other places. We see no reason why mainstream places should be left to all the sorts of people we mentioned before. After all cops, fascists and gym bros, despite their best attempts, absolutely do not own martial arts. Our presence there can challenge that and very often all you need is just a few good people, and the atmosphere can totally change. After all, most people just want to train.

As you can see, even if your leftist martial arts space is not a full time project with many classes a week, it can at least work as a crucial entry point for folks who very much need it. And that is very important on its own.

Left Hook is a volunteer run anti-fascist self defence gym in Brighton

[@lefthookbrighton](https://www.instagram.com/lefthookbrighton)



Disaster Anarchy (Part Two)

By Rhiannon Firth

In the previous instalment (DOPE 21, Spring 2023), I explored how disasters under capitalism have greater impact upon the poorest and most marginalised members of society. Risks and hazards not only impact unequally on precarious members of society, but they also magnify inequalities and dispossess more people. Anarchist forms of organising have typically played an important role in disaster relief, yet they are often either repressed or co-opted by state-centred approaches. Do anarchist approaches have anything to offer beyond merely state-friendly 'social capital', mopping up the failures of the austere neoliberal state? In this instalment, I look at some assumptions underlying state-centred approaches, and how anarchist approaches can resist and transgress these.

Mainstream disaster management paradigms, as well as many socialist and Marxist positions, believe the state has an essential role to play in managing and redistributing risk and resources. The main objection to the idea of mutual aid as an effective form of disaster relief is that humans in a state of anarchy cannot organise themselves effectively to deal with global issues like climate change, nor social issues like public health. This view has been put forward by political commentator George Monbiot, who has become emblematic of the environmental left, as well as Marxist academic David Harvey, and is a trope frequently repeated in left-wing and liberal media. This position led to near consensus with right-wing media during the Covid-19 pandemic that authoritarian measures like police-enforced lockdowns were the only way to deal with the pandemic, which were prioritised over community-based and resourcing measures (such as personal protective equipment; widespread, rapid, no-questions testing; community engagement and education; financial support for isolation).

Anarchists disagree. Anarchist ideas and practices, such as prefiguration and mutual aid, show that downscaling and localisation are often effective responses to structural asymmetries. For example, mutual aid – the practice of helping one's neighbours in a disaster, when systems of support provided by state and capitalism break down – does not aim to just put a sticking plaster over the gaps where the status quo fails, but rather to show that 'another world is possible' – a more caring society where people treat one another as equals, who are deserving of mutual aid. Charity assumes a giver and a taker, and a formalised organisation that regulates the relations between them. Mutual aid assumes that anyone can potentially be in need of help, but may also have much to give.

Mutual aid is a form of disaster response that starts from the experiences and impacts on humans and other living beings and the meaningful structures of life embedded in objects, habitats, and ecosystems, rather than focusing on keeping order by managing the effects on the state or economic system, treating humans as generic subjects. It starts from the position of each person/being. Rather than a top-down approach that creates roles people must fill, a bottom-up response would facilitate people to contribute and 'plug-in' to a network based on their own talents, needs and desires. Rather than centralised efforts under a lead organisation, this approach would encourage multiple small groups, and a proliferation of projects with different emphases and methods – allowing some overlap and redundancy.

A truly mutual aid effort should avoid securitisation and moral panics around empathic and humanitarian approaches (e.g. don't shame or arrest people breaking lockdown rules; or for failing to do their recycling). This does not preclude communities from instituting rules or protection measures but these should be democratic and decided by consensus, rather than imposed from the top down. Emphasis should be on resourcing, like medical equipment, community education and pedagogy, and support for people in need, rather than on order, securitisation, and criminalisation.

The form of organisation might be imagined as a proliferation of diverse small-scale alternatives – housing and worker co-operatives, community and permaculture gardens, localised food and energy production – engaging in various overlapping solidarities and mutual aid. This would require degrowth (a shift away from the relentless pursuit of economic growth and consumer accumulation) and, therefore, a wholesale change in societal values – escaping the 'rat race' of production and consumption.

Anarchism reimagines the temporality and scale of radical social change. There is an emphasis on the small scale, on degrowth and social recomposition, on a society bubbling with transgressive life through overlapping societies, groups, and organisations whose affinities and relations are immeasurable and un-mappable. Social change is both immanent and prefigurative, and does not require scaling-up through unity or a vanguard in order to be extended or politicised; such vanguardism tends to defer lived anarchy to the future. Transgression and insurrection are already a part of everyday life and are observable everywhere when everyday life is examined using an anarchist epistemology.

People like Monbiot and Harvey argue that the problem with anarchism is that it can't be scaled-up to provide an effective response to large-scale 'wicked' problems like

pandemics, climate change, and capitalist extractivism; however, degrowth and re-scaling is often an effective response. The powerful only accept solutions that leave their own position untouched, which effectively prevents degrowth: the state seeks to capitalise on all social relations. The anarchist reversal of perspective views humans' greatest enemy as the state – a particular way of relating – rather than as other human beings in themselves. Mutual aid is therefore always vulnerable to co-optation by controlling ways of being.

In my research, observation and interviews with Occupy Sandy, New York, and groups organising mutual aid during Covid-19 in London, I found that having a shared space, such as a squat, occupation or a social centre, was associated with groups who managed to ward off state power. Radical interviewees tended to favour accounts of mutual aid as a form of direct action that prefigures a stateless society and as raising awareness of structural conditions. Some argued that this meant that the 'helping' aspects of mutual aid (social reproduction) should be linked to more radical actions, such as occupations, eviction resistance, community self-defence, protests, and being explicit and vocal about radical politics.

It is important not to underplay the very real divisions in movements between these more radical perspectives and those who wished to keep 'politics' separate from mutual aid, nor to suggest these are two mutually exclusive 'camps'. In the book I argue that the (liberal) discourse of 'apolitical' mutual aid is not possible. Seemingly 'apolitical' perspectives serve to reinforce the status quo and co-opt mutual aid into securitised and co-opted versions with their racialised constitutive exclusions. For example, some Covid-19 'mutual aid' groups became more like neighbourhood watch groups, with an interviewee giving the example of having to talk a liberal group member out of calling the police on a group of young Black men for breaking lockdown rules.

Nevertheless, this urge to keep mutual aid radical is complicated by the fact that marginalised communities may already partake in their own forms of mutual aid, even if they don't call it that, nor call themselves anarchists. In such cases, the perceived fetishizing of political slogans or words, or of 'politics' as sectarian identities, can seem colonising and alienating, and get in the way of mutual aid. Even where explicit politics is avoided, mutual aid may have political effects through social recomposition, creating infrastructures, through prefiguring a more equal and stateless society and gift economies, through structural critique and consciousness-raising, and through direct action.



Rhiannon Firth is the author of *Disaster Anarchy: Mutual Aid and Radical Action* (Pluto Press).

It is available from the publisher with 30% discount using code FIRTH30. It is also available for free, open access at: library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/57974

Ain't Nothin' Goin' On But the Rent

By Alex Sumner

If you rent the home you live in, have rented, or know somebody who does, it is likely you are already aware of the many issues making it an unpleasant experience.

Mould, damp and generally poor-quality homes, intrusive (or, on the flip side, absentee) landlords, unfair rent hikes, the fear of eviction for no reason, being priced out of your community and forced to move away from family and friends... the list goes on.

A decent, safe and secure home can be the foundation of a happy and healthy life, but for too many of us that just isn't the case.

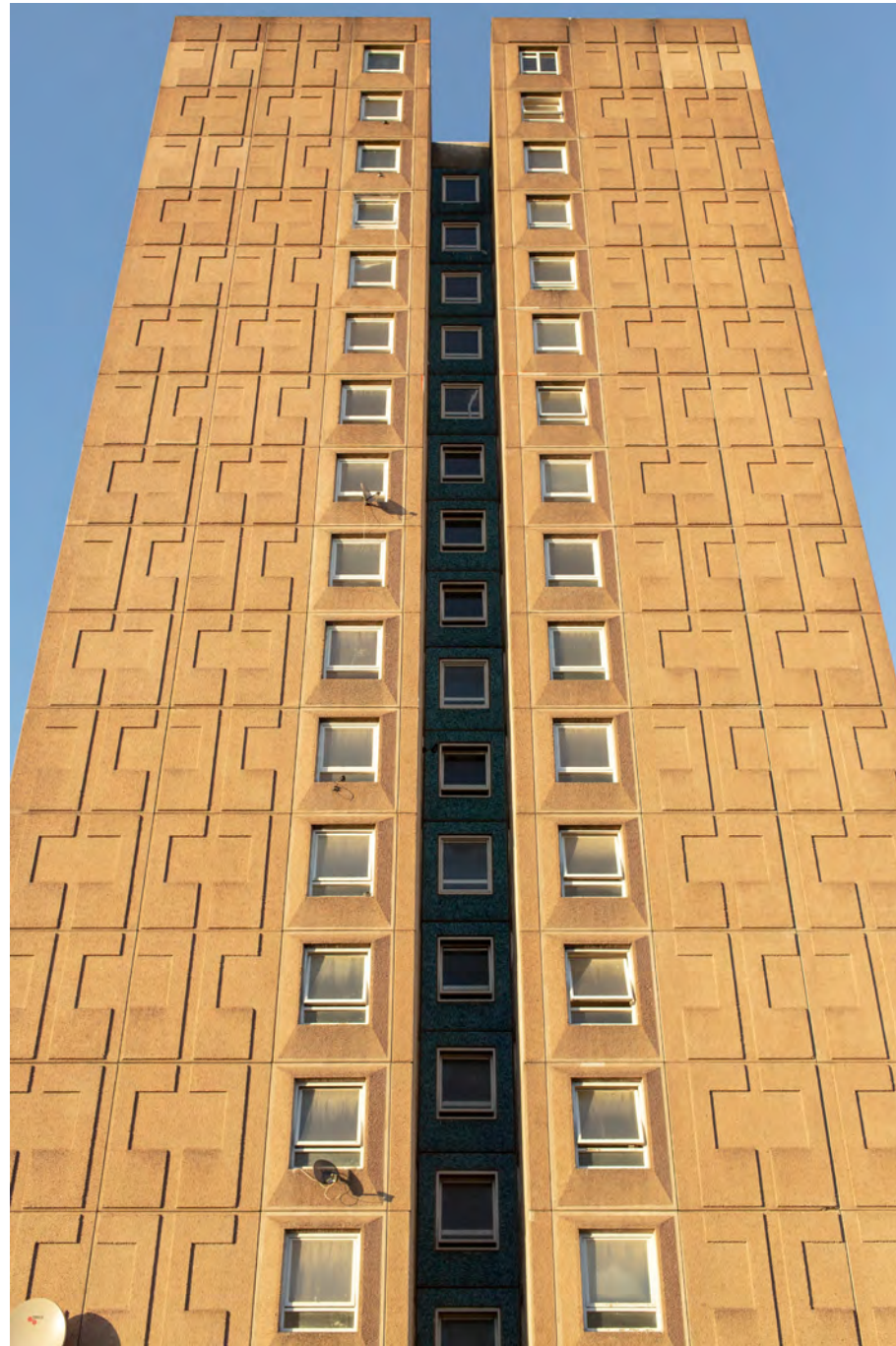
Successive governments have failed to get a grip on the many issues with housing in the UK, and we are left with the housing crisis that we live with today. This crisis can broadly be broken down into three areas: affordability, standards and security.

A driving force of this crisis is the diminishing number of social and council homes available, with numbers depleted and sold off through the 'Right to Buy' scheme not replaced as was originally intended.

This has driven more people to turn to private renting, a largely unregulated area with cowboy landlords making huge amounts of profit for letting out poor-quality or even harmful homes, unfairly kicking people out, and now cashing in on the cost of living crisis.

Alex and Jenny are ACORN members in Huddersfield. They were model tenants, paying rent on time every month, yet had to live in a property full of damp, mould and faulty electrics. This led to their two toddlers developing respiratory problems. They repeatedly raised the issues, which fell on deaf ears, until their landlord issued them a Section 21 'no fault' eviction notice – at the same time their third baby was due to be born.

This situation is all too common, but landlords are getting away with it. Councils are not enforcing the rules and standards that currently exist. Years of budget slashing means that many local authority 'Housing Teams' have been cut to the bone, so even where there is the political will to enforce the rules, there aren't the resources available to do this properly.



In some places we're also seeing letting agents encouraging 'bidding wars' among renters, artificially inflating prices and forcing people out of their communities.

It's an absolute state. And, ultimately, this all boils down to housing being seen first and foremost as an asset (a place for a few people to make a lot of money), rather than as a home for people to live their lives.

But it doesn't have to be this way. People are fighting back, and winning!

Thai, an ACORN member living in Bristol, was slapped with notice that her landlord wanted to raise her rent by 66%, which she couldn't afford. Facing homelessness, she came back to them with a reasonable offer – an 11% rent rise in line with inflation. But that was flatly refused.

"When I received the letter, I went to a couple of advice charities who told me 'there's nothing you can do about it.' I thought, 'no, I want to fight this,' and went to ACORN."

"We sent a letter outlining my position and what we wanted, but the letter we got back from the letting agents was combative – so next we arranged a meeting with the letting agents, and along with 25 ACORN members we marched on their offices. 4 of us went in and read out our demands.

"It was a powerful experience, having 25 people at my back."

"After that, we moved to a phone blockade. This was enough to get them to the negotiating table, and gave me three more months in the property for £50 extra per month (rather than £300 a month, which was completely unaffordable for me)."

"This stopped me from becoming homeless and allowed me enough time to secure a new home."

"I could not have got this outcome without a union. It has been an incredible experience and has brought me closer to my community, which is even more important in the current climate."



"Since then, I've gotten stuck in with union activities, attending meetings and training sessions, and I'm now involved in supporting somebody else who is facing eviction."

When ACORN formed in 2014, knocking doors to see what concerned communities most, it was quite clear that renting was a huge issue. While our union has grown and has truly become a community union fighting on many issues, housing has remained our bread and butter. And that isn't surprising, given its importance.

Since then, we've resisted dozens of evictions across the country, won hundreds of thousands in repairs, returned deposits, compensation and rent reductions. We recently won £100 million in fire safety measures for every council tower block in Bristol, after a fatal fire last year.

We've done this by bringing people together to take collective, direct action, to force the change we need. From picketing a landlord's office, occupying a Council meeting, marching on Parliament, or sometimes just making a phone call or sending a letter. Whatever action we take, our members are always front and centre.

Door by door, street by street, we have built an organisation that is fighting for our members and for our communities, but is also forcing policy change in the 'corridors of power.'

For the last few years, a focus of ours has been mobilising and pushing for the Renters' Reform Bill. First promised in 2019, this is potentially the biggest change to private renting in a generation.

In March, along with our partners in the Renters' Reform Coalition, we held a renters' lobby at Parliament, with hundreds of people from across the country visiting their MPs to lay out the need for reform and what this should look like. We grilled the new Housing Minister, Rachael Maclean, and got a commitment from her that these changes would come before Parliament this Autumn.

The Bill promises to end section 21 'no fault' evictions – the tool landlords can use to kick people out of their homes without reason, and with little notice. This will help people's security in their home, and will go a long way to lifting the fear of being made homeless that prevents renters from complaining about bad standards. A 'Decent Homes Standard' would also be brought in, meaning homes have to be warm enough, free from hazards and not run down, to be rented out. If implemented properly, it could significantly drive-up standards.

However, what's on the table so far doesn't address affordability, and we will continue to campaign for rent controls that bring prices down and ensure tenants have enough money to live comfortably, happily and healthily.

Unsurprisingly, landlords are lobbying hard against these reforms. They claim there will be no houses left as landlords will leave the letting game in droves if the Bill goes through. As long as they don't knock down their houses in the process, we don't particularly mind.

This time next year, ACORN will be celebrating our 10th year. In that time, we've developed a strong, national organisation that is standing up for renters,

changing the narrative and levelling the playing field, from supporting individual members to helping to set the agenda in Westminster.

Whatever happens in the coming months with the planned renters reform, one thing is for sure: ACORN will continue organising, continue growing and continue winning, until we have safe, secure and affordable housing for all.

Alex Sumner is a renter and a member of ACORN the Union. acorntheunion.org



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£1,000,000 APARTMENTS LEFT EMPTY

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a healthcare
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Homeless. Queer. Punk.

By NFA Queer Punx

Homeless; Queer; Punk. When these three identities come together, they are revolutionary and apocalyptic. At least, this is my experience. Growing up sexually closeted, homeless (according to society) and a punk, with the shit tattoos and clothes to match the somewhat misinformed attitude, I lived a chaotic life. I stepped out of the closet, loudly, proudly and very drunk in a squat I had found in East London, and my life has never been the same. Queerness became how I looked at the world, not just who I had sex with.

We have smashed through the stairway wall of Yellow Door to occupy the empty DIY and household goods shop below the complex of lawyer's offices that form part of our annexed property empire in Whitechapel. This is the sixth building in the row of Transport for London-owned buildings we have gradually acquired, clambering over the rooftops as more of our friends need shelter during the pandemic. We clean up the space, readying it for the Intersquat meet-up, diligently sweeping the floor and removing mounds of dust. We decorate - huge, warped murals of faces morphing across the walls. Soon we are painting not only self-portraits, but each other, smearing white paint over naked bodies and sliding across the floor squealing and laughing as our efforts at orderliness descend into wild play. The next day 50 squatters from across London hold a rowdy meeting in a shopfront reeking of fresh paint...

I realised you can only be queer in relation to something. I am queer in relation to capitalism, homelessness and punk. My newfound freedom allowed me to question what punk was. It allowed me to question what homelessness was. By applying queerness to the world around me I could practice radical inclusion, kindness, consent and honesty, not just in the bedroom.

We arrive in hi-viz and push our way through the security, blagging it as the next shift. Confusion reigns as police and bailiffs try to distinguish who is in charge. The illegal eviction attempt at the 2-year old Archway squat escalates, with 20 squatters battling police and fake bailiffs, pelting them with plant pots from the rooftops and driving them out of the building floor by floor. Police charge, batons drawn, as I am rugby-tackled to the ground and pulled up by anonymous arms, believing I have been caught and a night in the cells awaits, until I hear someone whisper "get up and run". We hold the building till 5am, when a lawyer arrives by black cab brandishing paperwork that declares an injunction on the eviction. Archway remains occupied 2 years later.

Punk became an exclusive movement, with leaders and people on pedestals. The thoughts and politics had unwritten rules to abide by. Punishment was rife and theories of liberation were only applied to those inside our small communities. As the wonderful people at 'F**king Cancelled' podcast say, "If you don't like the police, then don't act like cops to each other". Liberation is for everyone. The squats of East London showed me radical inclusion in a way I had not witnessed before. Arguments were solved and no sides taken, and people were only ever excluded for the period of time they were problematic. The spaces were more black, with more dogs, and more stylish than I had ever witnessed. I was asked within minutes of arriving "what do you need in a crisis?". I felt safe, and able to admit my mistakes and own problematic behaviour. This is what Queer and homeless punk looked like. Now I wanted to question this. How could I learn more, and be more radical in my approach to life and liberation?

After losing our laptop and all our music during a drunken night of blood and needle play, we bail on our first gig, and instead hold a 9-person queer orgy in the balcony of the squatted Salvation Army building in Bristol that has been hosting us during our chaotic visit. NFA queer punx are in town to 'show them how we do it in London'. People sit on the stage of the hall and gaze up to the gods at us as we lick, suck, squirt and fuck between the chairs. They only voice dissent when we suggest crucifying one of our number on the wooden cross that is there.

The answer, an easy one: the action, a lot harder. Sobriety.

After hearing the songs for the first time in a park and rehearsing a couple of times, we are onstage at the Persons Unknown Festival in an empty swimming pool in Manchester. We are closing the 3-day event, waves of our friends rolling across one another as we shout-sing into the microphones the same song that we sang in defiance outside Archway: 'I'd rather be a squatter than a scab ...'

Now, in my abstinence, I am able to better question, or queer, the world around me. We formed a collective, "NFA Queer Punx", and we set about sharing the message of recovery as a radical queer way towards revolution. The tail end of the punk movement I was so attracted to, alongside the rave scene and much of the squat movement, was riddled with addiction, and very few avenues to explore sobriety without excluding yourselves totally.

A trans-youth is attacked in the protest against Posie Parker, and we kick off, pushing back violently and screaming at the top of our lungs: "non-binary people

exist." I burst into existential tears as the melee continues. We chase Posie Parker down the road and she has to hide in a pub for safety. The next day, a video of us in black bloc hits 3 million views on the Daily Mail website. It is of one of us telling transphobes: "we got rid of Colston, now we're getting rid of you. You're on the wrong side of history. Get in the sea."

The exclusivity of the movements and the crippling punishments we dished out because of our anti-police views started to seem extremely anti-queer, and extremely anti-punk. Queer Punk is real punk, and what we can achieve by questioning the norms of capitalism, the social constructs of race, gender and class, is both apocalyptic (in the real sense of the word, meaning to reveal) and liberatory. Queerness allows to ask why. Why did this person act abusively? Why were the government so scared of punks in the 80's, but don't give us a second glance now? Why are 250,000 people homeless, when 600,000 houses sit empty?

We have broken a former Chariot's sauna in Vauxhall for a week-long event of trans and sex worker lead workshops and performances, opening with a sex party on the Friday night. White people with dreads have to wear hats, and I have diligently stuffed my problematic locks into a baseball cap, and now sit in the working sauna watching a comrade getting pegged while chained to the ceiling. I go off to find a mop. We're gonna need it.

Just by answering these we can find reasons to house the entire homeless population, and the incoming immigrants, we could understand what needs changing in our own movements to make the white heteronormative capitalist patriarchy scared again, and we could break cycles of trauma and addiction with love and kindness. No Fixed Abode Queer Punx are a radically inclusive, wholly liberatory and accountable movement, willing to fuck up, try everything, question everything, forgive everyone and thrive collectively.

We have been at Avebury for solstice: 400 vehicles have occupied the Ridgeway. We had no money, and used mushrooms we had grown to trade for food and whatever we needed as we bounced and giggled between the stones and the sound systems. Inner Terrestrials played an acoustic set, Jay's vocals drowned out by the singing of the crowd. As the party winds down, the police move in, cranking up the pressure gradually as the party-goers begin to dissipate. Fig's giant converted bus arrives to collect us, a Stagecoach to the future, complete with the recording studio where we will begin to experiment and play with the soundtrack to our queer and homeless culture.

Fig Rebel and Serge are members of NFA Queer Punx. nfaqueerpunx.bandcamp.com



Nobody at Amazon is Living a Good Life

By Ashley Nelson

Amazon creates a competitive work environment to squeeze productivity out of their workers. Which tactic they use to exploit you depends on the department you're in. Some work stations have two monitors, and one shows everyone's work rate in the entire department. Seeing how fast you're working is extremely embarrassing, especially to new workers, and it pushes you to work harder so no one sees you doing a bad job. In some departments, they post our rates in a private chat so people can see how well we're doing. If you're doing poorly, your name pops up in red. Taking a five-minute break drops your rate, no matter how hard you work for the rest of the day. Ultimately these systems exist to shame you. When managers reprimand you for being in last place, it happens in public, because it's about belittling people to push them to do better. Workers work extra hard to try to ensure that they're not being reprimanded, which stops them from going to the bathroom or attending to other personal needs. Lots of young people at Amazon are damaging their bodies just so their image won't be damaged, so they won't look lazy. But at the end of the day, pay checks always come out the same, and raising your rate won't change that. In five seconds, I put away MacBooks, cell phones, and other items worth thousands of dollars – dollars that go to Amazon in seconds while I'm not even making \$1,000 in a week.

They build warehouses in low-income communities, and a lot of workers come from single-parent homes. A lot of these people are coming from systems where they've been locked up and incarcerated numerous times, or they come from the foster care system, or they come from public schools that did not teach them anything. No child of a parent that went to Harvard is working there. No child of a doctor or a lawyer is working there. They employ people who have no other option for employment and it's that much easier to exploit them. Where else would they go to make a living? Similarly, Amazon takes advantage of people with physical and mental disabilities. They take advantage of these people because they don't know they're being taken advantage of, and when they get yelled at in front of other workers, it affects them differently. Amazon makes sure to employ people who will not

fight for themselves, either because they can't, they don't know how, or they're too scared to return to a system that leaves them unable to find work elsewhere.

Expecting perfection under these circumstances is insane. Amazon demands perfection from its workers, but creates conditions meant to break them down, then punishes them for lashing out. One man I worked with had just been released from prison after 20 years behind bars when he started working at Amazon. He was fired for acting aggressively, but it's well known that Human Resources employees often lead with aggression themselves. Someone who spent 20 years in prison is conditioned to respond a certain type of way to aggression, and might not know how to communicate differently. In this situation, a labor union creates an effective layer of communication that protects the workers from abusive tactics. There are an extra pair of eyes on the warehouse floor, so workers are able to protect themselves, protect their jobs, and protect their livelihoods when they have someone trained in how to speak for them.

Workers' power has always been in the building, we just never had a voice. Now that we have that voice and we can voice our opinions, people can start to learn their rights. Since we made the union, the treatment inside of the facility is definitely different. People are being reprimanded less, they're getting more training, they're getting more support from Amazon. But only because Amazon has this umbrella over them now called ALU. What workers need to remember is that if these corporations wanted you to have a good life, you would not have to work at this job while you work another one. You would not have to work at this job and still be on food stamps. You would not have to work at this job and pick up extra hours. A corporation that really loves its employees would make sure that its employees are living life, good lives. Nobody at Amazon is living a good life except for the general manager, and I don't think even he's living a good life.

Ashley Nelson is a JFK8 worker in the Pack Singles department at Amazon and a member of the Amazon Labor Union (ALU)

amazonlaborunion.org



Human Beings

By Kevan Thakrar

When the state imprisons people, they disappear us. The whole process of becoming a prisoner is designed to strip the person of their personal autonomy. Individuality is something that must be removed and replaced with complete conformity, implemented through the oppressive control and restrictions of the prison environment. From the prison issue clothing, the degrading, routine searching of the person, to the uniform design of the cells, people are transformed by this state dominance into products to be handled within the warehouses that are prisons.

When the prisons disappear people, they segregate us. The restrictions and conditions are so much more severe than anywhere else within the Segregation Units of the High Security Prisons of the men's prison estate. Deliberately so: intended to break the spirit of the men who, for various reasons, find ourselves detained within these punishment blocks.

These environments inflict solitary confinement upon their victims, often for an indefinite period of time. It can mean more than 22-hours a day locked in a cell in isolation and kept separated from all other prisoners during the brief time allowed to shower and/or get locked in a cage outside like an animal for 'exercise' – and, in my case, it has continued for 13-years so far. Remember how it felt to have to stay at home during the Covid lockdown? Imagine how many more restrictions you could have survived, yet we must endure within segregation daily.

It would not be permissible to keep an animal in places like these, and there would be total outrage if a woman were to suffer such mistreatment, but men are seen culturally as tougher and much more deserving of this brutal inhumanity. From personal experience, I can confirm this differentiation of the sexes that comes through the bad politics of the chauvinistic and anti-feminist approach – which portrays women as 'damsels in distress' in need of help, and men as warriors capable of toughness only seen in the 'stronger sex' – is absolute nonsense (and it is this concept that sets the foundation for the perpetuation of the culture of toxic masculinity and misogyny that this country is drowning in). No human could possibly survive such inhumanity undamaged.

Even those good intentioned supporters of prisoners, and those opposed to the structure and/or existence of prisons, can easily fall into the trap of fighting the battle to release women and/or abolish women's prisons, which indirectly implies that the concept of prison for men is an acceptable one. Separating the sexes like this to prioritise one over the other will always harm the struggle for those who are left behind. But all prisoners are human and we all feel the pains of imprisonment regardless of whether we are seen to express them in the same, or culturally acceptable, ways. Prison is a political state tool of oppression and all of us who are victims of it are therefore political prisoners, stripped of our ability to live normal lives in freedom.

This dehumanisation and oppression is not caused exclusively by the state and misguided anti-prison campaigners, organisations, and prison reformists, but even by those who seek to bring compassion to the prison experience through making contact with prisoners from outside the walls. Those offering this support can miss the fact that restrictions they impose upon the terms of their communication with the imprisoned can easily replicate both the measures that the state apply and the feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and powerlessness that they instil within the recipient. Although it is entirely valid to have safety/security concerns when making the initial contact with anyone, including a detained person, especially if you are the first to do so, paranoia over the potential for the prison to become aware of you is not at all helpful or necessary, and to view this potential relationship as some form of good deed, charity, or case work in which you must monitor your 'capacity' is extremely harmful and possibly even abusive. Despite being cages, prisons are not zoos, and those of us detained within them are not animals to look at, study, or use to attain an anecdote to tell your social group to boost your standing through your 'unique experience' of having communicated with a real-life prisoner.

Being unwilling to trust the person with your real name and/or address, provide photographs so they can see who they are communicating with, give your phone number so they can call you or undergo the visitor approval process that is required prior to an in-person meeting with those held in the most hostile conditions only adds to

the trauma that is inherent in the loss of liberty we face. It is common to post personal information on your social media or dating apps and give out your phone number to people you just met, so what indication do you think it gives when you withhold this information from someone inside?

Friends do not impose such limits upon their friendships, but it seems the power imbalance seen in the dynamics of the relationship when only one of them has their freedom can all too easily lead one to a significant oversight of the potential harm they could be recklessly inflicting through these restrictions, which in their mind could appear entirely essential and innocuous but, in reality, is exacerbating the dehumanisation of the imprisoned human. Where I am does not define me, prisoners are human beings who deserve the same consideration as you hope others would give to you.

If silence is violence, then what is concealing your identity, like a faceless bureaucrat within the state apparatus, from someone suffering directly from state physical, sexual, and psychological violence? Oppression must be resisted everywhere, even when its source is within ourselves, to the detriment of others. Empathy and love can transcend prison walls and cages, but can only penetrate your heart if you are alert to the possibility and allow it.

Kevan Thakrar

As well as suffering from a miscarriage of justice, having been convicted under the controversial and discredited legal doctrine of joint enterprise, Kev is one of the 50 men within English prisons to be detained within the Close Supervision Centre (CSC) system under Rule 46 of the Prison Rules 1999. When the Segregation Units disappear people, the CSC is where they end-up. This is the front-line in the battle against state violence where you must resist or capitulate, and Kev more than any other continues in the struggle as a champion of the people. Last year the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture raised the conditions of his detention with the government and he is taking a judicial review of the policy of allowing indefinite segregation, which enables his ongoing solitary confinement due at the Royal Courts of Justice in 2023.



Please help combat his isolation and help him endure the state inflicted torture by writing to him at:

Kevan Thakrar – A4907AE
 Segregation Unit
 HMP Belmarsh
 Western Way
 Thamesmead
 London
 SE28 0EB

It is also possible to email Kev using emailprisoner.com
 And if you can, please donate to: gofundme.com/f/solidarity-with-kevan-thakrar
 Read more from and about Kev on justiceforkevan.org

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blackcurrentcentre.org.uk

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Decentre, Freedom Building, London, E17QX,

Glasgow Autonomous Space, Glasgow, G5 8JD,
glasgowautonomous.weebly.com

Mayday Rooms, London, EC4Y 1DH, maydayrooms.org

Liverpool Social Centre, Liverpool, L1 4HY
liverpoolsocialcentre.org

London Action Resource Centre, London, E11ES

Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1BB

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Oxford Action Resource Centre Oxford, OX4 1DD
theoarc.org.uk

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VENDORS

Name:

Amber



Location:

London – Liverpool St mostly, but sometimes Soho as well.

How did you get involved in selling DOPE Magazine?

So, basically, I seen people handing out this magazine and I wasn't too sure what it was at first. I was in a dilemma because I didn't have a job, I didn't have any benefits and I was looking to turn to crime, which I had been doing. I was quite surprised when I said "what do you need?" and they said "nothing, you just go on a Friday to this place [Freedom Books, Whitechapel]." I thought it was a really good idea and I've not looked back since.

How has selling DOPE been useful to you?

I was actually, and I don't mind this being printed, at the time, I was working as a street sex-worker, and it was getting to the point where girls were getting attacked and it was getting very dangerous. If I'm honest with you – this makes me feel upset – this magazine's saved my life.

In this day and age, now we've got all this technology as well, everything is so difficult if you don't have a fixed address. For example, Tesco's in Bethnal Green, at a certain time of night will not accept cash, will only accept cards. If you're hungry you can't actually buy anything unless you have a card. So, a person could maybe nick a sandwich, and it just goes on from there.

Where are you selling?

As much as Liverpool St sometimes does my head in, you can't help going back there, it's like a comfort zone. I started off there and I know all the roads – when you do this newspaper, you see other vendors and you might stop for a 5-minute chat, like, how's things going? And you kinda keep each other motivated, which is why Liverpool St is probably my number one spot. Sometimes I do venture up to Soho, that's quite good, but mainly Liverpool St.

There's kind of an unwritten street rule – for example, if you see someone begging outside a shop, you don't stand there and try and sell the magazine. it's just a mutual respect thing.

Is it easy to sell an anarchist newspaper?

Let's put it this way, it didn't go down well on the King's Coronation – it didn't go down well at all! The thing is, it's a newspaper that tells you what everyone pussy-foots around – and, a lot of people, that frightens them. Y'know, I think we're overly polite, British people, whereas this paper, it says what needs to be said. You find the people that don't support it are the people that are maybe police officers, maybe politicians, or things like that. Obviously, we all know that we don't hear 100% of the truth.

People need to understand that this magazine is not an anarchist version of the Big Issue. It's completely and utterly separate. This is so good because you don't need photo ID. It's more freedom, it removes the obstacles.



Photo: Emil Lombardo



READ AMBER'S POEMS:
www.mypoeticside.com/user-6286

In most cities... graffiti stays until the sun bleaches it to entropy.

But in London... graffiti is rapidly censored with thick brown paint, which makes the red trackside bricks look like miles of Chocolate Digestive.

If you paint something 'pretty' they clean it double quick, which I don't mind nowadays, cos most colourful graffiti looks like Haribo vomit.

But teenage me was livid. Back then I found solace in putrid stars, arrows and drips in my standard-issue struggle against grey skies, grey concrete and detentions in grey portakabins.

So we adapted. We ran/run off down the tube tunnels with a single can of silver spraypaint to poke a hole in the dullness.

We chromed - they browned - we chrome - they brown - today it's chrome - but tomorrow they will paint it brown.

Liberals will tell you that tagging is a meaningless, ugly scourge. But look out the train window, there are two intense ideas converging and exploding, silver tags are like Refreshers dropped in the government's Coca Cola.

Us lot, in black tracksuits and trainers, jumping fences with bags of stolen-then-discarded paint that glitters in the dark, finding ourselves, friends and freedom. Them lot, in luminous orange uniforms and boots, with rollers and bucket paint, come to erase our fun, getting overtime from public-private partnerships.

Our colourful Dondi Burner Dreams got bashed into Dickensian etchings.

And that's the uk way: british character survives the dark satanic mills to become cynical and sarky, british teeth endure tea and biscuits to become stained and wonky, of course british graffiti by the naughty kids of the noughties ended up monochrome minging.

And then there's the trains. If someone graffiti's them they're taken straight out of service to be cleaned (I'm sure people would prefer to have a different colour train rather than no train at all, but there we go).

Frustrated, we conceived a new technique; they removed our paint, so we removed theirs.

Nitromors is a brand of paint stripper available from every hardware store in the country. It has a phlegmy texture, a toxic-fresh smell that skewers your nose, it feels cold and poisonous on your skin like a jellyfish, it makes the paint crumple and fall away, exposing the raw metal beneath. Nitromors does to a train what salt does to a slug.

When Fume DDS discovered it in 2002 he said he knew that, like the first caveman to fashion a bronze blade, London graffiti had walked from the spraypaint age into the acid age.

And just at that time, graffiti was becoming fashionable once again. There were drippy tags on Topshop adverts, Top Of The Pops videos and Shoreditch galleries.

But the aesthetic of Nitromors graffiti wasn't just 'ugly', it was 'HIDEOUS', and hence bolt-cuttered a hole back out from the enclosing cages of co-option.

If you question private property the answer is... well... British Transport Police come with meatwagons, helicopters, dogs and tazers. Stick us on observation, harass us, nick us, raid us over-and-over-and-over again. Strip search us, scan our biometrics, triangulate our phones, deny us bail.

It's dark grey vengeance. They send us home from the police station in grey tracksuits, grey-faced magistrates give us community service, electronic ankle tags, curfews and strict restrictions, grey-wigged judges then send us to greyest-ever prisons, where I served a whole blue year in a magnolia solitary cell.

It's all so british, spending millions on locking up people for graffiti. It makes no sense unless you pay attention to the industrial complexes of politics, media, prison and policing. Then it makes perfect sense... private sense.

Prison worked as intended, it made us worse, way, way worse, and that's music to both sides' ears.

As they say, 'everybody's happy nowadays'.|

