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"WE ARE NOT IN THE LEAST AFRAID OF RUINS.
WE CARRY A NEW WORLD IN OUR HEARTS,
AND THAT WORLD IS GROWING THIS INSTANT."

BUENAVENTURA DURRUTI.

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Extinction Rebellion, Rinse and Repeat

By Zoe Ereni

I knew someone who found her husband’s brains splattered on the wall. It was my first boyfriend’s mother, and her husband was the father of her eldest son (which isn’t a graceful sentence, but this is a true story). It goes a way to explaining her hopelessness. Like many people I knew when I was young, these people had grown up out of misery and into addiction. It was Portugal some time in the Seventies and they had nothing to live for. Their bodies became chemistry sets and he developed an obsession. He knew that a UFO was fixed to land on this particular hill, and he couldn’t miss it. This eventuality became his everything. He still got high but they weren’t fighting any more; she couldn’t get his attention. After weeks of hiking in the middle of the night, staring longingly into the black, like every other drug does, the delusion stopped working. The disappointment was too much to bear. What had he been waiting for? Confronted by nothing but a grassy knoll, my first boyfriend’s mother’s first husband returned to an empty apartment and shot himself in the head.

I’m not a fan of authorial intent but if I were going to tell you what lesson to take from this parable, I would suggest a few. Firstly, we should build a world in which a potentially hostile alien visitation is not preferable to the world itself. Secondly, be wary of how you use drugs. Finally, it is important to know it is not enough to merely exist; people need to feel as though they are living *for* something.

There is a view in psychoanalytic theory, albeit a reductive one, that neurosis is an abundance of doubt and psychosis is an abundance of certainty. I have been applying this model to climate fear lately and, honestly, it’s alleviated neither my neurotic or psychotic thinking. As a child in the Nineties I experienced endless summers; as a woman I violently oscillate between positions of hope and hopelessness. I am told the world as I know it is almost certainly heading inexorably for an apocalyptic end, maybe several ends, but that I should still recycle and reproduce. On the one hand I have environmental alarmists attacking anyone who does want children, climate deniers on the other: too much doubt, too much certainty. Like most treatises on moderation, the ‘good’ answer lies somewhere in between: it is good to know what acid can do for you but don’t end up like the guy who confuses the launderette for an industrial noise gig.

Still, it’s not easy to maintain equilibrium when you’re being burned alive.

Last year I was at a conference and a psychotherapist described a client of his as suffering from paranoid delusions. The young man was, he said, obsessed with climate change. I don’t know the whole story, perhaps he was suffering from paranoid delusions, but as the saying goes, that doesn’t mean they’re not true. The psychotherapist was about sixty years old and didn’t have to think about what it means to plan a future while the Arctic Circle is on fire. I told my analyst recently that the one good thing about being caught between wildfires and fascist raids on my last trip to Greece was that it meant that I didn’t have to settle an argument with the anti-natalists. I was born in 1989: the future I was sold as a reason for me to pay for university no longer exists. How do young people reconcile a world slipping further away from them with a willingness to live as though it still exists?

The mid-twentieth century saw the mass ‘hospitalisation’ of North American women diagnosed with hysteria. Many were observed to have psychotic delusions, commonly that their decency was under scrutiny, that they were being gossiped about and spied on. These were middle class women in small suburban towns; they *were* being gossiped about, their decency *was* under scrutiny, and their doctors were almost certainly men. This isn’t to say that identifying the societal basis of a pathology means we can shut up shop. Psychosis can be devastating whether or not we can position its manifestation in a fuller biography. Nowhere is this more horribly realised for me than in Robert Sapolsky’s recounting of a young medical student who died trying to perform surgery on himself during a psychotic episode. The problem isn’t that being gossiped about makes you paranoid, or that the razing of the Amazon leaves you in despair, it’s how you behave with that knowledge that matters.

Recalling the apocalyptic visions I had in Athens, I experienced an uneasy catharsis. For a moment I stopped caring. Who wants to bring another child into a world in such turmoil? I no longer have to think about the fact that I’m thirty and live in an unaffordable city. I reach nihilism about once a year, then I remember that every single epoch has had its own extinction event, has ruminated on its own end. Everyone thinks they’re special, and they are.

Children growing up in the shadow of the Atom Bomb had a singular experience, then they became old and carefree and sometimes neglect to consider new disasters. The rest of us are left with the burden of accepting unspeakable horror and expected to rise above it with impossible stoicism. At least we have the Wellness industry to enable such complacency.

It was recently reported that a rising number of young people are expressing disruptive anxiety about climate change. The apocalyptic rhetoric of Extinction Rebellion has definitely made an impact on public discourse, but it has evidently left children feeling nihilistic, and this is a rational response. What is the point in going to school every day when there might be no more jobs by graduation? The answer is more of a burden than they should have to bear, but somebody has to cultivate the seeds of a new world in the razed ground of the old one, and if we want them to do that then we have to give them the will to do so. This means focusing on novelty, innovation, and a return to the unfashionable utopianism of a society prior to capitalist realism. We have lost control and the lunatics are running the asylum, yet we live as though things can be different, because it is imperative that we do. But we have given birth to a generation with too much certainty of their own despair. They are burdened with premature adulthood, so it’s time to relearn the optimism of what childhood once was, or so I’ve read.

Liberation from the vortices of history is tantamount to the original existentialist position. We make a choice – the only one we can make. Do I live or do I die? Well, I’m making the choice to live despite, through, because of and beyond the patent absurdity of it all.

Zoe Ereni is a writer, performer and activist who would have been a style icon and comedian a century ago.



Between Sofas and the Streets

By Hannah Green

My experience of homelessness began in December 2018, when I started suffering with severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and only ended very recently.

After university, I worked abroad to escape everything familiar. I experienced sexual abuse as a child, and then sexual assault whilst at university, and I had to get away from the environments that were constant reminders of these awful points in my past.

When I returned, things instantly spiralled. The flashbacks and nightmares started straight away. Everywhere I turned, I saw reminders of my worst memories, and it terrified me that I could bump into the guy who abused me.

I ended up at my cousins, but it got to the point where I felt like I was getting in the way, so I left. It was absolutely terrifying: that moment realising I wouldn't have anywhere to stay, that I would literally be homeless. I was so lucky that I had come across Scarborough Survivors, a local mental health resource centre who referred me to another local charity who help young people who are homeless.

I went into Nightstop, emergency accomodation for under 25's – you stay in a volunteer's house overnight, get a hot meal and a shower. I stayed in 4 places over 9 nights. It was awful not knowing where I would be staying each night until mid-afternoon, then turning up at a stranger's house. The anxiety was overwhelming and most days I broke down to the staff at Survivors. My mental health was at its lowest, and several times I was at the point of wanting to end it all.

I was then offered a supported lodgings placement, where I stayed for 3 months. It filled me with relief knowing I had a fixed address with meals, familiar faces and support from the charity.

The landlady also accommodated exchange students, usually "lads." My PTSD is male specific, so this was especially distressing. It caused panic attacks, which led to me getting really angry, mainly at myself for not being able to deal with the situation.

I wasn't sleeping or eating properly and was regularly self-harming. I couldn't deal with being around up to five males in such a confined space.

This led to repeated disputes with the charity. They didn't have any other placements, telling me I just had to "work through it." I understood, but it wasn't that easy. I was learning to trust males again, but slowly, through trauma therapy.

There was no quick fix. Leaving the placement meant I was "intentionally homeless." I was learning to push myself and leave my comfort zone without inducing panic and triggering flashbacks. But one weekend multiple male students were staying, and walking through the lad-filled kitchen triggered a crippling flashback. I couldn't stay, so I returned to Nightstop.

I was on the waiting list for the local hostel, and now a "priority." I was in limbo, not knowing where my Nightstop placement would be, or if the hostel could accommodate me. Nightstop kicked me out at 8:30am daily, so I spent hours pounding the streets, waiting for Survivors to open. I was lucky, I never spent a night on the streets – unlike most of the people I've met in the past year.

Two weeks later I moved into the hostel and life began to settle. I knew where I would be sleeping and felt safe, as staff or security were always around. There were still guys in the hostel, but I had my own private flat, lockable door and bathroom.

Hostel life exposed me to new situations – drugs and crime – and when my mental health was at its worst, I experimented. This was partly due to the people I was associating with in the hostel, and a certain amount of peer pressure. I was quick to realise the drugs were only making my mental health worse, the increased anxiety and panic attacks meant I was struggling to function on a day-to-day basis. With the help of the staff at Survivors I learned how to say no. I managed to get myself into some uncomfortable situations and ended up in countless arguments with other residents. I was also assaulted one weekend, I'm still not really sure why.

In October, I was offered a flat in the "quiet" block owned by the same company as the hostel; however, the intensity of trauma therapy and an ongoing police investigation into my childhood meant I wasn't mentally ready to live alone.

I was assured I could stay in the hostel until after Christmas, but a few weeks before, a flat became available in the most notorious block. I knew from people I had met in the hostel that it was well known for drugs and crime – someone had recently been stabbed there. As I'd "refused" the previous flat, I had to accept, even though the boss at the hostel had promised me I could stay. I felt extremely let down, especially with it being so close to Christmas. PTSD means I need to feel safe, and the staff assured me that I would.

Just before Christmas I moved and instantly hated it. Within days I'd rang an ambulance for a suspected drug overdose and then the police for several incidents. It was so loud. The all-night parties and dealer above me meant no sleep. I was always on edge: between the noise and people coming and going constantly, I couldn't settle. I spent many evenings in the crisis cafe in Survivors, and I am so, so grateful to the staff there. I definitely would not have pushed through it without them.

One evening I was forced to call security from the hostel. I had been assured that if there were any problems, I could ring them for help, but they said it was a police matter; the police said they wouldn't respond to noise complaints. It was 3am, I couldn't cope, there was nothing I could do other than deal with it myself. I broke the guys electric meter and the music stopped. In hindsight, it was a bad move: threats from the partygoers poured in, from "petrol bombing my letterbox" to "battering" me. They were probably idle threats but left me terrified, intensifying the PTSD.

The police advised me not to return, so I ended up staying on my friend's sofa; however, that was also temporary accommodation and guests weren't permitted, so we had to fly under the radar. Those three weeks were extremely chaotic, I had to pack up my stuff every day, so the staff didn't know I was there.

Things are now looking up: I've moved into a private flat, I've been getting paid to write and I've been given some amazing opportunities recently.

Most people who are classed as homeless are either engaging with services, or else are not eligible for any sort of help.

A lot of people have asked me what they could have done to help. I spent 403 days classed as homeless, and during that time the most important thing anyone did for me was listen.

Having a normal, human conversation, more often than not, means more to a person than anything you could physically buy.



Hannah Green is a writer and activist.
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Poems

By She Drew The Gun



I'm going to share a couple of poems with you.

The first is actually a song; it's called poem because it started life as one. I'd seen an article about the police being on a drive to get rid of homeless people off the streets in London because they were unsightly and bad for tourism. They kept putting those anti-homeless spikes up anywhere where people were sleeping and I was just thinking about how fucked up it was, how backwards that we were trying to keep up appearances so that people could feel more comfortable when they bought their union jack tat – it just seemed ironic. It was also at the time when the Labour party were doing their one shade lighter than Tory thing and there genuinely seemed like there was nothing between any of them, nothing to believe in from anyone who conceivably had any power to change things. Fast forward half a decade and we've been through a lot: the country, or at least the older contingent, fueled by the right wing propaganda machine, said no to genuine change towards a fairer society, and we find ourselves once again being ruled by a bunch of self-serving sociopaths – this time during a global pandemic no less.

The second piece is my response to that. I just hope we come out the other side of this fighting for the so-called “low skilled” workers that actually keep us going, and fighting off the corporate power grabs that tend to happen wherever disaster strikes.

Poem

Can't believe what I'm reading when I open these sheets
they've got the police, getting 'bizzy', cleaning up the streets
cos that's what we need now to make the place neat
take the homeless man's rags, no sleeping bags, no place to sleep
cos we're far too civilized around here to see
an unkempt human being, a broken human being
open up your eyes, are you seeing what I'm seeing?
a misplaced, made to feel disgraced, human being
what, it's not enough to just pretend you don't see him
you can't stand the sight, so you have to disappear-him
well I hope you feel more comfortable doing your sightseeing
taking pictures, buying fucking union jack magnets and keyrings

life give me something to believe in
no lies just something to believe in
am I the only one that's grieving?
these things that belong to you and me that they are thieving

and how long till they build a wall and call it a 'private' city?
they've got walls made out of laws to exclude you and me
and now they take away our right to fight these laws for free
no legal aid no more, justice only for the wealthy
but they're trying to build a healthy society
so that everybody knows you don't get nothin' for free
no scroungers, no living-room lounge's, living off me
can I suggest you're seeing exactly what they want you to see?
a monster, a cancer, a threat to your liberty
how 'bout a scapegoat for their crimes,
a victim of the times,
everything you're not meant to be
how about a badly prepared, scared, human being
how about a necessary cog in the economic machine?
cos if there was no unemployment tell me how would things be
would you still feel lucky to be working 40 hours a week?
we're like a caged bird and they got us by the beak
give us enough to eat, enough to sleep, enough to tweet
but there's not enough space between the ground and our feet
no singing songs of freedom but were not flying free

life give me something to believe in
no lies just something to believe in
am I the only one that's grieving?
these things that belong to you and me that they are thieving

see this whole world's got me hurting, got me feeling undeserving
got me questioning my worth in this sad system that we're serving
find no place in this twisted race for property
is making profit the sole aim of humanity?
save the banks, bring out the tanks if they disagree
while we're at it let's invest some more in military
all our friends have shares so why shouldn't we?
oh, and the markets are demanding that we give away for free
everything our grandparents fought for to some company
it's called wealth creation, it's more efficient you see

oh, sorry I forgot the free market would set us free
I forgot to only think about I, mine, and me
while brothers and sisters have nothing to eat
brothers and sisters at home and overseas
so I can't lie down and I won't let it be
while we are working for a market, that doesn't work for we
these things that they're thieving are yours and mine
you know that they're stealing but there's still time
if you feel this way too.

94 pound fucking 25

Shoutout to everyone who's been laid off, had shifts cut
got no cushion, no savings, and no trust fund
strapped for cash and trapped on zero hours contracts
to the financially constricted, and anyone already just subsisting
we need nothing less than a transformation in the way we're existing
a transformation in the way we see “women's work”
carers and childcare workers, cleaners and servers
teachers and nurses, and sex workers
low waged or unwaged, working below the surface
feeling undervalued and feeling nervous
stressed by household debts
stretched living standards, and no safety net
living in premeditated precariousness
cos if you need cheap labour
keep the plebs in distress.
Just tryin' to stay alive
to anyone who can't survive on 94 pound fucking 25
with no bankers' bonus,
hope we can find some beds for the homeless
anyone in fucking psychosis
cos of the state of a system
that's so cold and so hopeless
those resisting asylums, and resisting domestic violence
shout out to supermarket workers stacking shelves in hell
everybody feeling unwell, or unable
or been treated like shit for 10 years cos they're disabled
wahey now we found the magic money tree
unfortunately it's not for you or me
in insecure employment, or in-work poverty
it's for the party of bought science, and dishonest responses
bent MPs, greedy landlords and power stance nonces
taking pleasures in austerity measures
disaster capitalists, circling like vultures
all the billionaires, retreat to your bunkers
ready to carve up the state and decimate cultures
get ready for the greatest corporate hand out of all time
cos people in shock get fucked every time
or we could wake up and change the script, rewrite the book
fuck mass hypnosis that got us stuck on self-destruct
individualism, consumerism, bullshit neoliberal constructs
do you really think they give a fuck about us?
corrupt institutions and a complicit press
time to deconstruct the military industrial complex
pause ecocide and think about next steps
respect for all life and habitat
change direction in the aftermath
without a fucking union jack flag attached
an internationalist perspective on the current world order
borders keep the poorest in their own four corners
while we line the pockets of all the wealth hoarders
who's gonna be the financial fallout's shock absorber?
we've got worldwide delusional disorder
looking forward to when they privatise water
“well the markets needed boosting cos we had a bad quarter”
time is getting shorter, time to start healing
collective improvement, planet breathing,
fuck the war on terror and the war on drugs
we need war on forest fires and war on floods
war on unnecessary plastic goods
and the parasitic vampires sucking our blood
a week ago they were happy to 'let loved ones die'
just like a free market mitigated genocide
then they saw the scale and changed their minds
shit themselves in case we realise
all the holes in their system, and the results of all their cuts
and that their system is shit and it's built on us.



She Drew the Gun
are a band from Wirral, England, fronted by
singer/songwriter Louisa Roach.
shedrewthegun.com



The Conspiracy of Kings, Class War and the Coronavirus

Erica Lagalisse interviews Spartacus Tonans, Supreme Magus of the Kitchen Garden 007’, author of Occult Features of Anarchism.

So, is the Coronavirus part of a great global conspiracy?

A conspiracy called capitalism. The virus doesn’t need to be manufactured by governments to serve elite interests. States intervene in pandemics not to mitigate human suffering but to consolidate their power, so it is no coincidence that governments are taking the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to amplify police power, outlaw protest, and remind you to fear your neighbour. Of course, we are encouraged to live in solitary isolation, scrolling through the apocalypse, breaking only to play digital war games or watch crap porn while making Jeff Bezos rich buying shit from Amazon; however, it is also true that physical distancing will slow down the rate of infection and allow more people to survive. In regard to the politics of this new “Crown Virus”, like so many other Conspiracies of Kings, both things are true. This is the line I walk in my book.

Occult Features of Anarchism is a feminist take on anarchism, a critique of posh lefties, and the “true history of the Illuminati” all in one. How would you sum it up?

It’s a historical essay that shows how what we call “the Left” developed in complement with occult philosophy and New Age spirituality. In the hands of power, “magic” is brought to support authoritarian projects – politicians and fascists know this well. Yet if it were not for early revolutionaries mixing what they understood to be “ancient magical wisdom” with new materialist science and social discontent in new ways, we may not have seen the rise of Left revolutionary movements: Occult knowledge is adaptable to a variety of projects – pyramid schemes, levelling schemes, and pyramid schemes for levelling – we’d best not ignore it.

Can you tell us a bit more about your approach to “conspiracy theory”?

The phrase “conspiracy theorist” is code for low-class. Otherwise, university lecturers that discuss the covert operations of the CIA would also be called “conspiracy theorists.” This is worth noticing, because we need coalition-building now more than ever, and just as lefties should not write off hippie New Agers, neither should they assume that the “conspiracy theorist” must be a fascist. Of course, precisely because things can veer in this direction, it’s even more important that lefties come up with an effective way of engaging “conspiracy theorists”.In the process, we might consider the extent to which “conspiracy theory” involves valid social commentary.

Some “conspiracy theories” are bonkers or blame Jews for global poverty, in which case, arguing with a fan is an important anti-racist intervention; but sometimes calling someone a “conspiracy theorist” is just class prejudice disguised by another name. Academics make their knowledge inaccessible in a variety of ways, which means that the best way people have to investigate why the world seems stacked against them is to ask the internet, which means people are going to find a lot of seductive “conspiracy theories.” I don’t think we should make fun of anyone for that. Also, the ruling class really does seem to be trying to kill us – it should be considered a fair guess.

Can you elaborate on the idea of “conspiracy theory” as critical social commentary?

Many YouTube videos tell stories of the Knights Templar finding secret treasure under Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem during the Crusades, with Illuminati-controlled Freemasons later using it to collapse the great world religions into one big banking tradition in the name of Lucifer. Yes, this story sounds different than Polanyi’s in The Great Transformation (1944), which also explains how global elites forsake traditional allegiances in the project of modern capitalist banking – social scientists will always prefer to highlight “systemic forces” rather than the whimsy of a few knights. The pop culture version is too allegorical for academic tastes but, given that many “conspiracy” buffs think banks are so bad they must be Satanic, it should be easy to see how some could become interested in anti-capitalism instead of fascism. (For academic readers, my advice in a nutshell is: replace Foucault with Bourdieu.)

Ok, getting to the good stuff: who are the Illuminati?

Once upon a time, there was the French Revolution, and all the Kings and Queens of Europe were very upset, so they formed the Holy Alliance. Known as the “Conspiracy of Kings,” it was they who pledged to cooperate in international publication bans, transnational surveillance, and deportation of militants by any sovereign threatened by “revolutionary inroads”. The Illuminati, on the other hand, started before the French revolution, and considered state and church corrupt. They criticized landlords and private property. Started by a Bavarian professor in 1776, it grew from five students to 54 members 3 years later, including people like Mozart. Members shared provocative Enlightenment ideas that are now commonplace, such as the value of science, while contemplating how to make society more egalitarian.

In 1783 a member tattled to his employer and a repressive campaign began. This is the first time we hear claims made that all Freemasons are “under control” of the Illuminati – but it was the government talking then.

How has the story gotten switched around?

Partly because propagandists in the early 20th century sought to vilify Jewish people by associating them with banking and Freemasonry. There are also people in power now who gain from us ignoring capitalism and the World Trade Organization by focusing on Jews or lizardmen. The classical Art of Memory, revamped as magical practice in the Renaissance, was further re-invented within psychoanalysis and modern psychology, and is now used in the media to (mis) guide us. In fact, both mainstream news outlets as well as bros pumping out “conspiracy theory” videos employ this long-developing art of using sensational images to inspire certain mental associations and manipulate memory. We really are being fucked over by magical mind control, just not in the way some “conspiracy theorists” suggest. This is where I would say those suspicious of COVID-19 place their attention, by the way – the virus is authentic, but so is the dark art of Public Relations.

You explain that you write about the cosmology of anarchism to challenge atheist anarchists who look down on religious or spiritual people despite claiming to be anticolonial at every turn. But there’s got to be another story: what’s the scoop?

Well, there’s the fact that I love math. Are mathematical forms the underlying structure of the universe? Or is mathematics a language applied to an ineffable reality that always exceeds representation? It’s no coincidence that I study the history of sacred geometry in this first book, and study how activists fuck up “intersectionality” with algebra in my upcoming one – mathematics is very seductive, and not just for me. Why does symmetry impress us? To what extent is statistical thinking cultural or cognitive? Why do people love YouTube videos about the “Golden Mean” so much? Why does the Art of Memory work? Is Aby Warburg’s theory of images a form of Lamarckian evolutionism? How many triangles can I find in Hegelian philosophy? This kinda stuff is my jam. I used to draw geometrical diagrams instead of writing outlines for my term papers – I lost marks for it and was told it’s because I have “synesthesia,” some kind of mental illness. Wizard sounds better, don’t you think? Just like splitting yourself into pen names for an interview sounds better than you talking to yourself.

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NEW YORK

LIVE



Masked Up: Crisis and Class

By Ben Tippet

We tend to remember big historical moments as images rather than words: people climbing over the Berlin Wall in 1989, the smoke of the twin towers in 2001 and the forlorn faces of bankers leaving their offices for the last time in 2008.

It's unclear yet what images will come to represent the COVID-19 crisis. While governments across the world talked about fighting the virus in terms of waging a war, we might remember that it is often the images of war that are the most controversial. War photographers are disdainfully asked how, when faced with human suffering up close, can they take a picture rather than intervene and help?

Writing about class inequality during these times can run into similar problems. The COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact have entrenched class inequalities along every line. Yet simply documenting the scale of the injustices people will face can, like war photography, leave its victims seeming powerless and its audience emotionally fatigued. At its worst, it can make class inequality seem inevitable and unchangeable. Like the images of war, we are left with a spectacle of suffering but no path to bring an end to it. This is why it is crucial, when we analyse class, not to just see it as an inequality that divides us but as bonds between people that can also liberate.

Let me draw out an example from the ongoing crisis to show what I mean.

One of the most fundamental questions about class is to ask why some people are paid so much more than others. The answer, according to mainstream economics, is that pay reflects how productive a person is: the more skilled, educated, experienced and profitable they are, the more they will be rewarded; however this narrative conveniently ignores the fact that wages also reflect social and political power. Before the COVID crisis, many on the left tried to expose this point by posing a hypothetical thought experiment along the following lines:

Imagine for a moment what would happen if all the private equity managers in the City of London couldn't turn up to work. How much of an impact on our lives would this actually have?

While there might be a case that the loss of these jobs would cause some damage to the economy, would it not also be reasonable to ask whether the world might actually be a better place? Compare this to an alternative case where all the paid carers – the workers who look after children, the elderly and the sick – stopped turning up for work. The negative human impact would undeniably be immediate and devastating.

COVID-19 has turned this thought experiment into reality. Across the world, care workers have made it onto every government list of essential workers. Needless to say, no private equity manager has.

Despite now being recognised as “essential”, care work is one of the most insecure, underappreciated and low paid jobs in Britian. Over half of frontline care workers are paid less than the real living wage. They are five times more likely to be on a zero hours contract compared to other workers in the economy. And much like in the rest of the economy, class compounds with gender and race when it comes to social care: 83% of frontline care workers are women, and disproportionately BAME.

Unsurprisingly, the homes run by private equity-backed firms are rated as among the worst. Even before the crisis hit, one in six UK care homes was at risk of failure. This is why German leftists use the term Heuschrecken – locusts – to describe private equity firms.

Like images of war, this class exploitation is undoubtedly horrific. Yet, unlike those images, the concept of exploitation does not represent its victims as powerless. This is the key to understanding class as both a sharp divide but also as a potential for liberation.

Exploitation is when one group controls and appropriates the labour of another group through their ownership of the workplace. There is a clear hierarchy: the owners get rich off controlling the actions of those who work; however, the workers are not passive but active in their own exploitation.

The profits of the private equity firm depend on carers getting up each day and actually going to work. Without it, there wouldn't be exploitation and the care home wouldn't make any money.

In the current crisis we can see more clearly than ever that care workers are not powerless – in fact, the whole country is dependent on them. If they stop working, all of the wealth comes tumbling down.

The image of striking in the UK is best represented by the miners' struggle in 1984, both its size (it was the country's largest strike since 1926, involving over 142,000 mineworkers) and the long-lasting impact it has had on working class political power. Striking in the care sector, however, is not like striking over coal.

Many of the jobs that people now do are based on affective ties between those performing the service and those who need it. Withdrawing labour in such a context is different to the old industrial battles in the factories. Unlike looking after someone, coal doesn't care if you don't dig it out the ground.

While this is a challenge, it is not insurmountable and there are many examples of care workers withholding their labour. Last year, 600 care workers voted to go on strike over docked pay. In 2012, care workers, outsourced from the NHS to a private equity run company, successfully defended their pay after going on strike for 90 days – one of the longest strikes in the history of the UK health sector.

One of the deep tragedies of the COVID-19 crisis has been the impact on the people who live and work in our care homes. An open letter by Care England (an industry trade body) reported in The Guardian documented how the elderly who live in homes have been tragically overlooked: “Instead of being allowed hospital care, to see their loved ones and to have the reassurance that testing allows; and for the staff who care for them to have the most basic of PPE, they are told they cannot go to hospital, routinely asked to sign ‘do not resuscitate’ orders, and cut off from families when they need them most.”

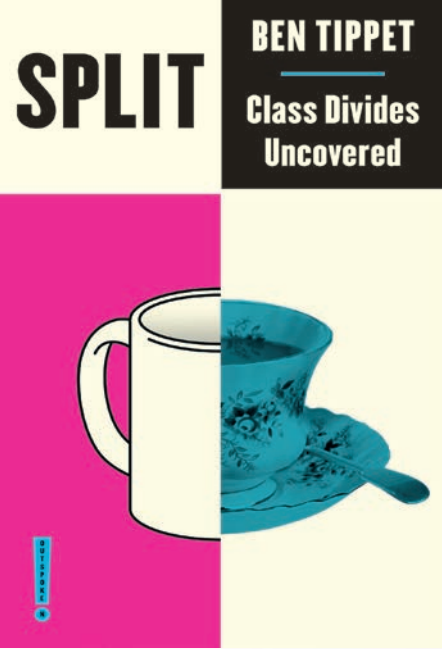
This has led to a shocking underreporting of the numbers of deaths in UK care homes. What we are seeing from Ireland, Belgium and Spain is that nearly half the deaths from COVID-19 have occurred in residential care. As of Easter Monday, only 505 social care workers had been tested for the virus compared to 48,000 tests in the NHS.

It is no coincidence that the crisis has hit the hardest in a sector that has been so undervalued and exploited.

The demonisation of strikes and attacks on migrant workers has undermined efforts by health workers to fight to protect their patients, jobs and workplaces.

The undervaluing of care work has led directly to more people dying. In the future, solidarity with those in the sector will be the only way to reverse this.

If the image of this crisis will be a health worker in a mask, then let it reflect the message that power lies in the hands of all the unnamed people who keep the system going. Masks are after all used for multiple reasons: for protection, but also for liberation.



Ben Tippet is the author of Split: Class Divides Uncovered (Pluto Press, Outspoken Series, 2020)

TEFL Workers of the World Unite!

By David Shewry

We teachers who teach English as a foreign language (TEFL) are often artists, writers, musicians and actors in (poor) disguise; a lot of loony-lefty-bleeding-heart-Corbynite-freethinkers, keen to challenge the status quo, at least when preaching to, or ranting at, the captive audience of the classroom (soapboxes are provided at most language schools).

Burly miners and firefighters, however, we are not. We're people people. We want everything to be nice and friendly in the staff room – save the anguish and frustration for the art etc. School owners know this, and so ensure managers present a warm, sweet-natured, non-confrontational front, with a healthy dose of passive-aggressive, and gentle, subtle reminders not to bite the hand that decides how many hours you'll get next week. It's a tenuous and tricky situation for many and, in the past, few have felt confident enough to complain. Those who do make trouble have often found themselves out of work.

What to do?

There are some who would advocate playing the system – skive, flout the rules, steal students from the school for more lucrative cash-in-hand private classes, and so on. That's all good, but it doesn't fix any of the real problems and it will get you down after a while. An alternative, which has been sadly lacking from the industry for too long, is to join the newly established TEFL-Workers' Union, operating under the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), a purely volunteer-run union, which seeks to put control and responsibility in the hands of the workers themselves. With the union's support, we can come together and take on the bosses to win better working conditions.

What needs fixing?

Zero-hours contracts impact in all sorts of ways. The industry has peaks and troughs through the year, and while salaried management never struggle to pay their rent or mortgages, teachers often see months on end with heavily reduced incomes and find ourselves moonlighting in those bar jobs we thought we'd left behind at uni. For those of us who've been in the industry for a while and might like a little more stability and security going into our 30s than we did at 21, if we want a mortgage, forget it on a zero-hour contract. Yet, even a nominal 15-hour-a-week contract can alleviate this problem, and usually at no cost to the company.

Then there's the unpaid work. Meetings. Training. Planning and preparing properly for all our classes to ensure we're delivering the high professional standards promised on the school's social media and marketing. You may be forgiven for thinking that employees ought to be remunerated for these extra hours of work, but those warm and convivial bosses will cheerily point out that the 'higher' rate of hourly pay for 'contact time' (£15/hour, perhaps) is calculated to take into consideration all the extra duties we'll be attending to outside the classroom. Teachers are left to calculate for ourselves the actual hourly rate when taking such items into account.

Often teachers are contractually bound to arrive 15 or 20 minutes before each class. We might have 2 classes a day. That's two and half hours a week unpaid time: 130 hours a year unpaid! Not only is this absolutely outrageous, it is, in fact, quite illegal. Companies cannot demand employees be on the premises at any time they are not being paid to be there, and it's the union's excellent legal team who will arm us with the case law to support this assertion when fighting with management.

We endure the pressure, frustration and instability through the long winter months, gritting our teeth and putting up with it because, hey, at least it's flexible – we can take time off whenever we want. So we thought. But when summer arrives, we're told:

“No, you may not have any holiday days during July and August. If we allowed teachers to take time off in the summer, we wouldn't be able to run all the classes, would we?”

‘But, but ... it's a zero-hours contract! That works both ways!’

“No time off in July or August – it's in your contract. And if you arrive late again, I will be forced to take disciplinary action – you must be here 15 minutes before class or I'll have a mini panic-attack. And please make sure you're at the meeting this evening – it's really impossible for me to do my job if teachers don't turn up. I won't tell you again.”

This, too, is illegal. A zero-hours contract does work both ways – but, again, taking a stand alone will quickly find a teacher back on the dole. It's something we have to challenge collectively if we're going to see any change.



A case study.

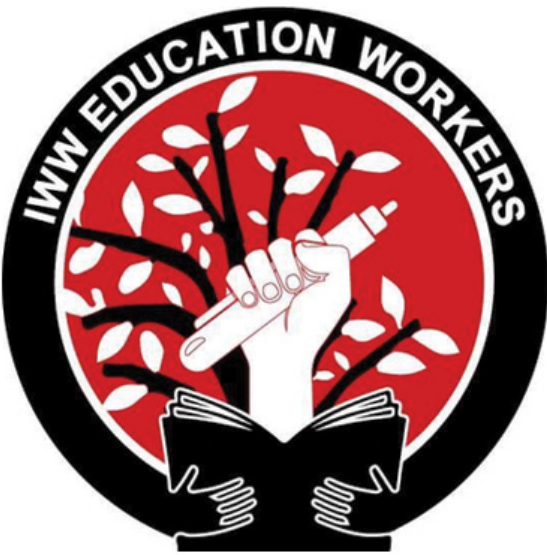
Back to the Union.

It started with a dispute over the pay-scale (there wasn't one, and we were all inexplicably being paid different amounts). Management was so slow and incompetent in dealing with this that we got talking and discovered that we were all fed up with the situation, but had been unwilling to say anything, since we couldn't afford to lose our jobs. Then, someone suggested joining the IWW.

The first real action we took was to illustrate the point about unpaid preparation and planning. If they weren't going to pay us for that work, we'd do it during class time. We met outside the school, all wearing red shirts in solidarity, walked in (not 15 minutes, but 1 minute before classes were due to begin), sat down in the staff room, and spent a full hour planning, photocopying and so on. Meanwhile, management frantically ran about distributing worksheets to bewildered students and explaining there was an emergency meeting. Underaged students were left unattended, not for the first time breaking the school's safeguarding obligations.

They hit back with formal disciplinary procedures, but we each arrived at the hearings well prepared, IWW union reps at our sides. Through each of seven long, trying meetings, management had to listen to a litany of their own crimes and failures. If they had followed formal procedure correctly, we might have been in trouble, but as it was, they couldn't hope to discipline a single one of us. All they could do was shake impotent fists, growling “don't do it again!” In time, they conceded that meetings and training would be paid (at the 'admin' rate of £10:50/hour, but still ...), and we won 5 days' sick pay to boot. The 15-minutes thing was scrapped. The summer holiday blackouts were also grudgingly removed. A proper pay scale was introduced and, once, we even got a little pay rise. Between our school and a couple of similar cases at others in the area, the TEFL Workers' Union was born. We'll never look back.

Alas, for various reasons, after all that struggle, the company went into decline. Student numbers collapsed and they went into administration. The little creeps waited till we'd all left the building on the last day of term, right before Christmas, to send out the emails making the entire teaching staff redundant. They messed that up, too.



David Shewry is a militant English teacher and member of the IWW TEFL Workers Union

How to Write to Prisoners By Carl Cattermole

If communication was water then the ‘free world’ is like an average British afternoon – the internet is pissing down on our minds. Notification! Email! Ding ding bzz bzz!

Prisons, on the other hand, have a micro-climate like Arizona. It’s dry as hell. So, when an officer slides a letter under your door it’s like the rumbling thunder in one of those euphoric movie sequences when the monsoons break.

Once you’ve understood that the subtext of prison is to further exclude the excluded (dress people in grey trackies, refer to them as numbers and deny them contact with the people they love) then it should become patently obvious why putting pen to paper throws a real spanner in its works.

But if you write in the wrong way you can do more harm than good. So, here are a few suggestions when it comes to prison letter writing.

You don’t have to write an epic
30-page odysseys are great, but they might mean that you never actually get round to writing. My biggest tip would be to make it easy for yourself cos then you’ll actually get the letter in the post box.

Have a book of stamps in your pocket to make the flow of info as effortless as possible: see it, stick a stamp on it, send it. A lot of people think about their friend in prison but never get round to writing. If you’re the organised one out of the bunch, then pounce while you’re at a party, pass round a card for your friend and get everyone to scribble them a message.

Don’t be silly
Avoid taboo questions such as “why are you in jail?” Also remember that censors read all correspondence so do not discuss contraband or contravention (“so, do you have a mobile phone?” etc.) or anything associated (“do you need any credit?” etc). Avoid sensitive issues such as sexuality because the pen pushers and the baton brigade have lunch, cigarettes and possibly affairs together.

Keep the tone enjoyable
I’m not going to explain ‘how to have a conversation’ but it’s pretty much as simple as that: be talkative, funny and tell a story; do not be woeful, depressing or insensitive (prison has enough of these vibes already).

English people are often scared to ask very basic questions – it’s comedic how much time gets wasted. Go ahead and ask what it is that they’re looking for and maybe state what it is you’d like in return.

Unless you’re writing to a politically-minded prisoner, I’d definitely steer away from long winded political analyses of the prison system. I think it’s great that politically-minded people so often involve themselves with prison solidarity but when people go straight in with terms like ‘oppression’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘state violence’ it can lead to an immediate disconnect.

Prisoners often know more about ‘oppression’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘state violence’ than anyone you’ll ever meet so I’m not suggesting people water down their ideas; in fact, I’d suggest that you let them take the lead – it might be you who needs to add more radical Ribena to the mix.

Commit to supporting someone.
If you don’t receive a response, then it may be for a number of reasons: maybe the letter didn’t get delivered (Her Majesties Prisons throw letters away rather than wasting staff time on processing them and prisoners often get moved or released at short notice). Or maybe the prisoner didn’t feel able to respond: being in prison isn’t particularly inspirational – there’s not much to report, the place can make your mindset turn similar hues to the walls (often grey, sometimes blue). I’d suggest persevering, maybe send them a second letter using an altered tact.

If you do receive a response, then you should endeavour to write back. A lot of people in prison have been let down by friends, family, teachers and authorities so forging connection with a new person may well be hard and if you fail to respond you’ll likely be cementing this sentiment.

Avoid making people explain really basic stuff about jail life
I remember people would be like “hey! Did you watch this and that on iPlayer?” (jail has no cable, no official internet, just a TV if you’re lucky).

Much more annoying was when people were like “oh my god! You’re locked up 23.5hrs a day! Surely that’s not legal? Complain to the staff!” Firstly, it is legal; secondly, the staff don’t give a shit; thirdly, I already wrote a book about these basics: go read it.

Send stamps
Prison provide two free letters per week but anything beyond has to be paid for by the prisoner. One way round this limitation is to send a book of stamps with your letter.

Find a prisoner to write to
A prisoner’s address consists of surname, prison number and prison (for example Cattermole A7187AB, HMP Wandsworth SW18 3HU).

Prison numbers are not openly available. Ideally, there would be an online directory of prisoners who have opted in for receiving post in order to help all those who receive zero exterior contact. It’d be relatively simple to institute (excuse the pun) but, if you know anything about the Ministry of Justice then you know this idea is far too common sense and humane.

Some prisoner addresses will be held by pen pal groups such as Bent Bars (specifically for buddying LGBTQ+ supporters with LGBTQ+ prisoners), anarchist websites and various pen pal sits such as prisonerspenfriends.org

Personally, I’ve never seen pen pal programs promoted within UK prisons. This results in the same old story: those who would most benefit from support (those with little social confidence and zero exterior contact) will be the least likely to receive it. To counteract this, you could suggest to a pen pal buddy that they spread word of the existence of pen pal programs to those other prisoners who’d benefit the most.

You can also email
Emailaprisoner.com is really cheap. They lack the personal touch of a letter but they’re quicker, cheaper and can’t be ‘lost’ by Royal Mail or the prison service. From some jails the prisoner can respond digitally but in others they still have to respond by post.

Send money if you can
Most prisoners and supporters aren’t looking for a baldly transactional interaction and it’s a potentially toxic power dynamic, so don’t worry too much; however, if the question of financial support arises then contextualise their predicament.

Prisoners are paid an average of £7 per week. This miniscule amount must be used to buy credit for overpriced phone calls (now you understand why so many prisoners opt for contraband mobiles), overpriced food (DHL have state-awarded monopoly on prison supplies then charge prisoners above market prices) and overpriced catalogue items (again, monopolised by big corporations like Argos and Littlewoods).

Hence, doing basic things like staving off starvation (prisoners are fed on less than £2 a day), using the official telephone enough to properly communicate, and buying a pillowcase are exclusive to those who have exterior financial support. Many do not have this luxury so – within your means – give what you can.

The link between debt and prison industries is far deeper than I’ll go into here. Carceral Capitalism by Jackie Wang is a must-read. You’ll never feel guilty for giving a few quid to a con ever again.

You’ll get in the swing of it
Prison often feels like a dystopian period drama – you could call it Downton Scabby. Anyway, you’ll shortly get used to handwriting and stamp licking, and if you’re finding it hard then remind yourself that your imprisoned correspondent is most likely acclimatising to taking a shit next to someone they met yesterday or eating rats to avoid starvation (true HMP story).

Carl Cattermole is an award-winning journalist, author of Prison: A Survival Guide (Penguin) and unrepentant former prisoner, currently on bail awaiting trial. prisonism.co.uk



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en.squat.net

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www.redemmas.org

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www.commonhouse.org.uk

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www.cowleyclub.org.uk

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diyspaceforlondon.org

Decentre, London, E17QX,
www.decentre.org.uk

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

Kebele Social Centre, Easton, Bristol, B55 6JY,
www.kebelecoop.org

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

London Action Resource Centre, London, E11ES,
www.londonarc.org

Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 1BB

SUMAC Centre, Nottingham, London, NG76HX,
www.veggies.org.uk

Partisan, 19 Cheetham Hill Rd, Manchester, M4 4FY,
partisancollective.net

Wharf Chambers, Leeds, LS2 7EQ,
www.wharfchambers.org

Warzone, County Antrim, BT2 7JHN, Ireland.
www.warzonecollective.com

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Mustan Kanin Kolo, Helsinki, Finland,
mustankaninkolo.info

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crack.forteprenestino.net

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival
www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk

Great Anarchists
by Ruth Kinna and Clifford Harper.

These introductions to anarchist thinkers delve into the anarchist canon to recover some of the distinctive ideas that historical anarchists advanced to address problems relevant to their circumstances. Although these contexts were special, many of the issues the anarchists wrestled with still plague our lives. Anarchists developed a body of writing about power, domination, injustice and exploitation, education, prisons and a lot more besides. Honing in on different facets of the anarchist canon is not just an interesting archaeological exercise. The persistence, development and adaptation of anarchist traditions depends on our surveying the historical landscape of ideas and drawing on the resources it contains. The theoretical toolbox that this small assortment of anarchists helped to construct is there to use, amend and adapt.

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