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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.”



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The Rhyming Guide to Austerity

By Potent Whisper

I wanna talk about money...

Dough, paper, moolah, dollar
Bread, cheddar, lolly, wonga
P's, cheese, dosh, fast stacks
Benjamin, capitol, gwap, hard cash

They say money makes the world go round, and they're right
Whether you like it or not it's true, money rules our lives
Everybody lives for it! Cos if we don't we die...
I do overtime on overtime and just about survive

How can people work so hard and still not be surviving?
The fact that I still live in London, is surprising
All of us know what life is like, the cost of living's rising
Even with a 9-5 our wages aren't sufficing

And then we gotta pay tax...

You got direct tax, indirect tax
Alcohol tax, cigarette tax
Income tax, VAT
National Insurance, CGT

That's, gains on capital tax
Local tax, national tax
Global tax, climatical tax
I'm shocked we ain't got taxable tax

You pay stamp duty, fuel duty
Business rates, council tax
Import, export, customs duty
Tax on property, inheritance tax

They tax us on the road and they tax us in the sky
They tax us when we travel, when we drive and when we fly
We all pay tax on almost everything we buy
They tax us when we're born and they tax us when we die
All I'm tryina say is that we pay a lot of tax!
Now no-one likes paying tax, it's not exactly fun
But I guess without it, our country wouldn't run
Taxation is the way we pay for services and welfare
Police, firefighters, benefits, health care

Tax is paid by the public and it's spent on the public
Well, that was until austerity was introduced and fucked it

Now, when I say the word austerity some people get confused
They've heard the word before cos they heard it on the news
But it's hard to understand in depth, it's kinda complicated

They understand a bit but no one's ever just explained it

What is austerity? Why did we choose it?
How does it affect me? Is it an improvement?
Is it really working? Have they ever proved it?
Do we really want it? Why do we still do it?

These are the questions that I'll address below
Cos austerity affects you all and you deserve to know

So
There's 90 trillion dollars on the planet
Billions are given to investors to manage
They've always looked for markets that are calm with little risk
And they decided housing is where they'd put their chips

Investors gave mortgages to people who could pay them
They made a lot of money, the market was amazing
But then they got greedy through the new deregulations
And started giving mortgages to anyone who craved them
(These were called "Sub-prime mortgages")

The investors didn't care if people couldn't pay their mortgage off
Cos the housing market was perhaps the most secure there was
If people miss their payments then their houses just get repossessed
And then the bank can sell them off and so the bank's not left with debt
So investors gave mortgages they knew that people couldn't pay
Cos they could always profit from the houses they would take away
But millions of people lost their houses, which surprised the banks
Housing supply surpassed demand and so house prices crashed

Suddenly, every bank, government and company
Involved in these mortgages all faced redundancy
They were all billions of pounds in the minus
And they called it the Global Financial Crisis

In a nutshell, everyone was screwed
Fucking them. Fucking us. Fucking me. Fucking you.
People around the world just couldn't believe the news
But luckily our leaders knew just what to do

They said it was a crisis of a global scale
They said we had to help the banks, they're too big to fail
That if we didn't save them, the economy would cave in
So we bailed out the banks instead of sending them to jail

Now you might be wondering how much we paid to save them
How much we lent them, how much we gave them
Well in the UK we paid 500 billion
And some reports say it was up to a trillion

After the bailout we were in a mess
Our deficit' was huge (the deficit's our countries debt)
We had to make a move to produce money fast
And stimulate an economic growth we hoped would last

We needed a remedy. We dreamed of prosperity
And our government decided that the answer was austerity

In other words:
Remember all that tax that you worked so hard to give them?
Well they used that money to pay the country's debt
So our country had less money left to fund the public system
Plus they privatised services til there was nothing left

So basically, they fed us shit and us lot swallowed it
The banks got paid and we got the following:

Cuts to local government: over 12 billion
500,000 council workers lost their jobs
Cuts to universities-£800 million
With rising fees leaving our students at a loss

Cuts to youth services-300 million
60 mil cut from the budget for our parks
Cuts to infrastructure worth £15 billion

Cuts to Adult Social care: 3 and a half

52% cut from Education
Thousands more homeless people on the pavement
15,000 beds cut for NHS patients
These are real statistics not speculation

They shut 343 libraries
64 museums, 3000 bus routes
380 care home companies
3000 mental health workers have been cut too
200 playgrounds-shut
350 youth clubs-shut
Connexions-shut
Leisure centres-shut
Over 600 SureStart centres-shut

Cuts to our NHS... forty billion
Over 60 hospitals and trusts are facing closure
Health and Social Care Cuts alone are **killing** citizens
120,000 deaths and over

But these are just figures
And we are not figures
We are real people, with feelings, ambitions
We're the people who **live** with the results of their decisions
We're parents, we're children, we're brothers

We're the people who starve to death because they've been sanctioned
We're the elderly who die at home, freezing and abandoned

We're the thousands of disabled people buried in the earth
Cos they killed themselves after being told they're fit for work

We're the sons who read the suicide notes left behind
We're the daughters of the 80,000 claimants left to die

We're the nurses, the workers, the lonely, the homeless
The everyday person, the broken, the hopeless

What has to happen before we reverse this?
How many have to die before we say that it's not working?
It's not just harmful, it makes no sense
If you want growth you don't cut, you spend!

When they cut public spending and raise our taxes
We have less money, so we spend less on average
We buy less products and purchase less services
So companies produce less and need less workers in

People lose their jobs, unemployment goes up
So we pay less tax cos we're earning less funds
Income tax revenue drops in huge measurement
Plus they spend more on JSA state benefits

Ultimately, there's one thing you need to know
You gotta spend money to make money
And that's why Britain's broke

We've suffered 10 years of these devastating policies
They've killed 200,000, they've damaged the economy
They've produced the total opposite of prosperity
It's time to reverse the cuts
It's time to cut austerity.



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<http://dogsection.org/press/grenfell-britain>



What’s Left of Friendship

By Nina Power

"We were all then convinced that it was necessary for us to speak, write, and print as quickly as possible and as much as possible, and that it was all wanted for the good of humanity. And thousands of us, contradicting and abusing one another, all printed and wrote – teaching others. And without noticing that we knew nothing, and that to the simplest of life’s questions: What is good and what is evil? We did not know how to reply, we all talked at the same time, not listening to one another, sometimes seconding and praising one another in order to be seconded and praised in turn, sometimes getting angry with one another – just as in a lunatic asylum."

Leo Tolstoy, A Confession (1882)

Do we today have an idea of what we mean when we talk about friendship?

Is friendship a political question, or does it occupy a place beyond such concerns, a place of the sentimental, of the affectionate, of love, and perhaps indefensible ties? Can, and even should we, be friends with people we vehemently disagree with? What happens when social media encourages an endless spiral of denunciation and competition for righteousness?

A certain hard, anti-friendly logic has, it seems to me, become central to political scenes and social discourse more generally, the ‘rule’ becoming something like: we cannot disagree, we cannot make mistakes, we cannot discuss. There is a correct line, or there is no relationship. We have become rigid and inflexible with each other. We have either forgotten, or we never knew, what it might mean to combine or relate friendship to our shared political affinities. Conversely, organising might mean working with people we otherwise do not have anything in common with, beyond our shared convictions. These latter relations can, on occasion, however, end up being some of the most meaningful. But how much tension can friendship bear today?

Perhaps the kinds of relationships that emerge as a consequence or in the midst of political organising and activism are not, in the end ‘friendships’ in any meaningful sense of the word, but instead an overlapping combination of ‘allyships’ or modes of action involving collaboration and co-conspiracy in which the goal or topic of the group is more important than the individuals involved in it.

Or individuals might be important largely because of the subject positions they occupy and because of particular skills they might bring to the group. Similarly, people that come together in the febrile heat of a particular moment – an occupation, a protest – are apt to over-value friendships forged in the heat of the moment too quickly and when things fall apart or become miserable again turn to each other – sometimes in comfort, sometimes in blame. We lack the resources today for a robust notion of friendship when we are thinking about political relations. Communists used to have the word ‘comrade’, and, at least sometimes, it meant something. What equivalent do we have today, in an age when we can (in the main) only say this word ironically? Alexandra Kollontai in 1921 wrote:

“The idea that some members are unequal and must submit to other members of one and the same class is in contradiction with the basic proletarian principle of comradeship. This principle of comradeship is basic to the ideology of the working class. It colours and determines the whole developing proletarian morality, a morality which helps to re-educate the personality of man, allowing him to be capable of feeling, capable of freedom instead of being bound by a sense of property, capable of comradeship rather than inequality and submission”

Kollontai links comradeship not only to class, but also to a proletarian morality that detaches feeling from property and inequality. When today we have endless ‘call outs’ and virtual firing squads lining up to denounce individuals for transgressions ranging from saying the wrong thing to behaving badly, or even for failing to ‘shun’ another person, it is easy to lose sight of this ‘capacity for comradeship’ and submit instead to a new kind of inequality: the righteous over the ‘wrong’, the morally pure over the ‘bad’ (or even the ‘evil’). But have we forgotten that we have all transgressed at points? Said or done the wrong thing? Disagreed on a point of principle? Simply not been able to understand where the other is coming from?

Sarah Schulman, a long-time activist in New York said this in an interview entitled ‘When Trauma Becomes Dominance’, following publication of her extremely important book *Conflict is Not Abuse*:

“One option is, that when you’re at in conflict with a person, before you start bonding with other people to hurt them, to ask them what they think is happening. I’m amazed at how often I’m asked to hurt people. *Why did you invite her? Why are you working with them? Why did you go to their party?* etc. We’re often asked to shun or socially isolate other people without ever talking to them. And people do this all the time. Your girlfriend broke up with someone, so you’re going to be cruel to that other person for the rest of their life? It’s unethical. Pick up the phone and call the person you’re being asked to hurt, and instead say, “Why is this happening?” The answer to that one question can be so illuminating. A whole series of brutal attacks that could drastically change someone’s life in a negative way can be avoided by actually discussing the conflict.”¹

Social media has made it extremely easy to denounce at a distance, without the human element that meeting face-to-face or even a phone call would involve. No one is obligated to be friends with anyone else, or to speak to someone who they believe has caused them real harm. Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that there is social recognition and even status in denunciation, not to mention a short-term thrill, knowing that someone has been wounded and taken down, and that you are safe, this time at least...

One of the problems with this short-term denunciatory tactic is the damage it does, which cannot be controlled. You might wish to call someone out or announce that someone is an ‘abuser’, but this claim might get picked up and circulated on a scale greater than you could possibly imagine, doing untold harm to the person you’ve named, leading to loss of employment (although sometimes this is a deliberate tactic on both the left and the right), loss of other friendships and relationships, and general social isolation. This may be completely disproportionate to the harm announced in the first place: there are undoubtedly situations that could be resolved in ‘real life’, offline, in personal conversations one-on-one or with a small group. The libidinal delight in ruining someone, and the righteous feeling that accompanies such actions is something to be wary of. There is harm everywhere, in initial acts as well as in vengeful retaliation. We learn nothing and lose everything if we cannot see that everyone makes mistakes, and that fear is no way to live, alone or together. After #MeToo and all the other naming and shaming campaigns, we must learn to talk to each other and survive in the aftermath, as victims and victimisers, or as the mixture of both that we all are.



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¹ <https://lithub.com/when-trauma-becomes-dominance-an-interview-with-sarah-schulman/>

In the Face of Defeat

By Richard Seymour



February 2018. A British warship sails through the South China Sea. Ominous. Scary. A ‘Brextemist’ plot?

Yes, says A C Grayling, a higher education entrepreneur who might have stepped from the pages of some J K Rowling fanfic. “A sunk frigate would eclipse EU talks nicely.”

As always in the shadow-world of conspiracies, one never knows who is really pulling the strings, but fingers point at Russia. Liberal broadcaster James O’Brien insists “it was always about Putin” “destabilising the West”.

Ben Bradshaw MP exhorts the government to “come clean about extent of [the] Kremlin’s reach into [the] heart of government”, having previously shared Louise Mensch’s explosive disclosures that “sources” with “links to UK intelligence” said Russian interference caused Brexit.

Journalists like the Observer’s Carole Cadwalladr seek to prove that “Brexit and Trump are entwined. The Trump administration’s links to Russia and Britain are entwined.” Alastair Campbell, piggybacking on these allegations, exhaled wholly un-ironic fury against those “destroying a country on false pretences”.

Time, surely, for some game theory. This British version of #theresistance is conspiracy theory for people formed by Nineties liberalism: Infowars for The West Wing generation.

Ostensibly due to this (hitherto underwhelming) evidence of Kremlin intervention, Hard Remain centrists now call for a People’s Vote on Brexit. One might well ask: wasn’t that the referendum? The referendum they insisted was only ‘advisory’? The referendum whose result prompted them to contrast ‘parliamentary sovereignty’ with mob rule? Wasn’t this what Barry Sheerman MP had in mind when he pointed out that Remain voters are “the better educated people in our country”? Why cede ground to the mob?

Hence the conspiracy theories about Kremlin subversion. It’s a form of ideological displacement, dreamwork, which preserves a sense of democratic decency. You don’t have to berate the thick mob if you can blame it all on nefarious foreigners.

The problem is, the argument that people were misled by Russian sock-puppets and Facebook campaigns, is not neatly separable from the argument that they’re stupid. Or at least naively suggestible in a way that their educated counterparts are not. There is, to give it its due, a kernel of truth to this. Brexit was overtly, if not exclusively, driven by racism, which is as dumb as it gets. That is an unacceptable argument, however, not because it further enrages people who should be patronised and placated, but because it externalises stupidity.

As the Dawkins and Graylings of the world repeatedly teach us, no amount of education insulates one from the human propensity toward self-deceit, self-sabotage, and self-satisfaction: idiocy, in other words. We are all afflicted. And we all find a curious satisfaction, which Lacan called *jouissance*, in our stupidities. If anything, education can make a certain form of stupidity stubbornly tenacious.

Which brings us back to the Hard Remain cause. There is, besides the anti-Russian counter-subversion campaign, an attempt to stimulate the appearance of a ‘youth movement’ against Brexit. Leading the charge here is a group called Our Future, Our Choice (OFOC).

Its main argument, spelled out by Femi Oluwole, is not that Brexiters are stupid, but that Brexit was forced on Britain by coffin-dodgers, so it should be reversed. He routinely claims to be #askingforageneration. This sociopathic leveraging of generational spite is hardly the best argument for opposing Brexit. But it is what one would expect from a shell company founded by a wealthy PR man and funded by Tory Remain groups. In a recent ‘fact-check’ style video, Oluwole takes to ‘splaining Brussels to Brexit voters, which he says is highly democratic. Oluwole inaccurately claims that the European Parliament is the EU’s executive decision-making body. No unelected bureaucracy to see here.

Also in this milieu is EU Supergirl of the Young European Movement, who really does dress up as Supergirl while strumming a guitar and singing ‘Imagine’. She claims, in so doing, to “represent the youth of Britain”. And she does, in the same way that Fathers4Justice represent the men of Britain – as twats – by dressing up in superhero outfits.

EU Supergirl was recently verklempt over being awarded Young European of the Year, an award given to one of a vanishingly tiny pool of young, passionate federalists each year. Which niche fanaticism is supposed, apparently, to strike millions of young idealists in their soul, rousing them to the defence of the Stability and Growth Pact.

Arguably working the same ersatz ‘grassroots’ terrain is the party formed by Economist correspondent, Jeremy Cliffe – The Radicals. Yet another Twitter account calling itself a “movement”, Cliffe claimed it would not only stop Brexit, but also deepen integration, create an EU army, and put Ken Clarke in charge of the EU Commission. It remains to be seen how such extravagant claims, sincerely made, relate to any real-world set of political forces.

To be fairer to all this than it deserves, at least some of it makes sense as media strategy. Certainly, Oluwole and his allies have appeared in print and on broadcast media. But it is very similar to the pre-referendum Remain campaign, in that it says very little and says it boringly. It is a compilation of slogans and gimmicks. It is chronically averse to treating people as anything but naively suggestible saps to be manipulated by clever ‘messaging’. And while it strives to emulate the visual style of the social movement, it is more visible in the retweets than on the streets.

Why, then, does Hard Remain swerve between xenophobic, Cold-War style paranoia, and such awful, patronising kitsch? Why repeat the same failed ideas, notably in its bland, business-led, centre-hugging, Project Fear-mongering, status quo-affirming message? Why systematically avoid acknowledging the aspects of the EU that might legitimately have alienated people, instead simulating unconvincing fanaticism? Why is it so incurious about the history of anti-EU struggles across the continent, led, not by the racist Right, but by trade unions and the radical left? Why has it nothing to say about the punishment beating inflicted on Greece? Why so unimaginative about its opponents, so lacking in self-awareness, so oblivious of its own, well, repugnance? Why, in other words, is it so stupid and yet so seemingly convinced of its higher intelligence?

This strange *jouissance*-laden stupidity, I suggest, is linked to a failure to properly register loss. It was understandable for those who were emotionally attached to the European Union or just felt threatened by the forces behind Brexit, to go into denial about the result immediately after. In such circumstances, people say all sorts of crazy things. Ignore the result. Independence for London so it can rejoin the EU. It was not uncommon for people to berate the malice of the elderly, or circulate stories of ‘Bregrets’ to demonstrate how utterly foolish and ill-informed Leave voters were.

At some point, though, one has to get a grip. As a long-marginal leftist, I can help these centrists work through defeat. To fully assimilate defeat is to become more curious, not less, about one’s adversaries. To become more interested, not less, in one’s weaknesses and blindspots. To acquire humility, not become self-righteous and paranoid. Failing that, the Hard Remain sell is not just politically but emotionally detached, spiralling off into its own subcultural niche.



Richard Seymour is a political activist who blogs at Lenin's Tomb. He is the author of numerous books, most recently Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics (Verso).

Make Rojava Green Again

By Debbie Bookchin

Like any activist working for deep structural social change, there are times when the ravages of capitalism seem insurmountable, when the long hours are overwhelming and when the tragedy of climate change seems almost too much to bear.

Sometimes, it's hearing that after a long battle against mono-culture, a giant multinational corporation has succeeded in acquiring massive tracts of agricultural land in a lush Italian valley and will destroy its diversity by planting it full of hazelnut trees – so the world can have more Nutella. Sometimes, it can be as simple as seeing the despondent look on the face of a young Starbucks employee, all but paralysed by the numbing tedium of her work running a cash register for 8 hours a day. At those times and others, I know there is one sure-fire way to get a morale boost. I make my way to the website of the Internationalist Commune of Rojava, where cogent articles and beautiful photos of gentle hands patting little plants into the earth restore my calm and remind me that there are people working with care and determination right now, literally on the ground, successfully making the environment a richer, more diverse place.

The Internationalist Commune of Rojava is the outgrowth of the dozens of volunteers from all over the world who have moved to Rojava to help build a new civil society that embodies the ideals of the Rojava revolution: feminism, grassroots democracy and ecology. Foreign volunteers who have joined the Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (the YPG and all-female YPJ military forces that have successfully routed ISIS from much of Syria), have been reported on widely. But much less attention has been paid to the civil volunteers who are working diligently in society to make Rojava a place that can provide the food, comfort, and ecological stability her people need to thrive.

In Rojava, more formally known as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, Kurds have established a bottom-up political system of popular assemblies that enshrine the values of non-hierarchy, women's liberation, ethnic plurality, religious tolerance, direct democracy, and ecological stewardship. The 96 articles of the Rojava social contract guarantee all ethnic communities the right to teach and be taught in their own language; they abolish the death penalty; and mandate public institutions to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination. They require that women make up at least 40 percent of every electoral body and serve as co-chairs at all levels of government administration.

They guarantee youth the right to actively participate in public and political life and promote a philosophy of ecological stewardship that guides all decisions about town planning, economics, and agriculture.

Importantly, the Rojava region is governed by a decentralised political system in which every member of the community has equal say in the popular assemblies that address the issues of their neighbourhood and towns. So, power flows upwards, from the neighbourhood commune where Kurds, Yazidis, Turkmen, Syriacs, Arabs and every member of the community meet together, to the district councils, to the city-wide and region-wide councils. It's an example of direct democracy in the truest sense of the word, and its profound human resonance is demonstrated by the fierce commitment we've seen in the men and women fighters of Rojava to defend it.

But the defence of Rojava must also include finding ways to feed people, to give them respite from a seven-year-old war that has yet to end, to heal those who have suffered tragic loss, and to maintain communities at an ecologically-sensitive scale. This is the goal of the Internationalist Commune, which has set its sights on finding ways to harness alternative energy, address wastewater issues, and make Rojava green again by planting 50,000 saplings to reforest the lands that were deliberately hacked down acre by acre by the Syrian regime. The use of deforestation – Kurds were forced to plant a wheat mono-crop for export to the rest of the country – was only one way that Kurds were made into second class citizens in Syria. The Syrian regime subjected Kurds to systematic torture, disappearance, the outlawing of their language, music and customary dress, and the deliberate enflaming of tensions with their ethnic neighbours. While those humiliations are now legislated away by the Social Contract and a new fully-democratic system of governance, the ecological devastation lingers.

To this great challenge, the Internationalist Commune brings the kind of creativity and passion that is borne of living communally and working together to build a better world. Whether problem-solving technical issues like how to irrigate land with grey water, or addressing complex eco-system issues like what kinds of natural habitats are most supportive of native wildlife and equally inviting to people needing a respite from city life, the International Commune's commitment and dedication – and its documentation for all the world to see – is one of the truly inspiring and moving aspects of the Rojava Revolution.

That work is now being presented in a beautiful book called Make Rojava Green Again, that explains their goals and reaches out to ecologically-minded people everywhere. Make Rojava Green Again, is a natural wonder, much like the landscape of Rojava. As I noted in my brief forward to the book:

“In language that bridges the utopian and the concrete, the poetic and the everyday, the Internationalist Commune of Rojava has produced both a vision and a manual for what a free, ecological society can look like. In these pages you will find a philosophical introduction to the idea of social ecology, a theory that argues that only when we end the hierarchical relations between human beings (men over women, young over old, one ethnicity or religion over another, etc.) will we be able to heal our relationship with the natural world”.

I have been buoyed by the fact that the crowd-sourcing fundraising effort has raised the funds for Make Rojava Green Again to be translated into several languages. Equally exciting is the fact that the Internationalist Commune is looking for volunteers, seeking technical expertise, inviting collaboration and ever-expanding its vision. I urge everyone who can to go to the Internationalist Commune website and be moved by the verdant beauty of the landscape and the dedication of the people living there. Help support their project by buying and reading this deeply thoughtful book. Above all, I urge everyone to support Rojava in every way possible: by lobbying leaders, writing letters to news organisations, and educating people on campuses, in community centres and workplaces, and in our neighbourhoods. The biggest threat to Rojava right now is coming from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his allied militias, who've invaded Afrin, one of the three Rojava cantons, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, looting, raping women and burning down Afrin's olive groves. It is imperative that we lobby our representatives demanding they support the Kurds, boycott arms sales and deliveries to Turkey, and insist upon the representation of Rojava Kurds in any Syrian peace negotiations. Ultimately, Turkey must release the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, and resume its peace talks with the Kurds in Turkey.

Rojava's health and future is the obligation of all of us who dream of an egalitarian, ecological society. In Rojava that world is becoming a reality as a result of the hard work of hundreds of thousands of people, including the members of the Internationalist Commune. We must defend and nurture it every way we can.



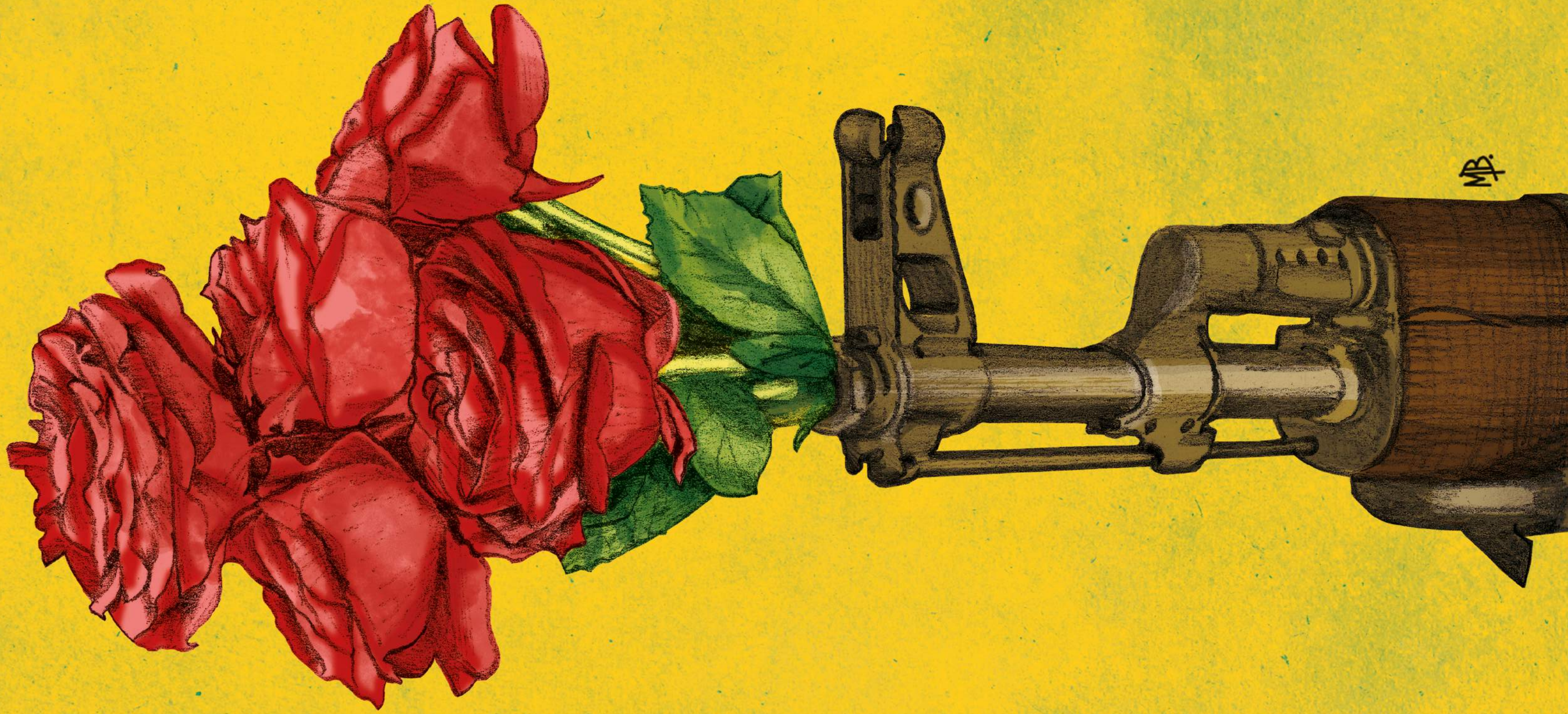
Debbie Bookchin is the co-editor of The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy, a book of essays by her father, the social ecologist Murray Bookchin.



She is a founding member of the U.S. group: Emergency Committee for Rojava, whose website is: defendrojava.org. The Internationalist Commune can be found online at: internationalistcommune.com



ROJAWA



Liberty Without Borders

By Helen Brewer

They have taken everyone they want to take. They are in segregation. I can only give you a picture of what has happened to our friend.

There were loads of officers, I couldn't count how many. Male officers too. And she was naked. She had a pink nighty, very short short short, up over her. And they handcuffed her hands behind her back and pulled them up to her neck. They were punching her on her side. She was crying and we were screaming "This is how you treat people!?"

The centre manager Jacki, she said she doesn't care if they want to take her back to Nigeria. When they wanted to manhandle my friend they tell me to leave. Jacki, she told me to leave the room, she said "This is my centre", and I said "I am a visitor in this room and I am not going anywhere". Another officer was bullying her and shouting at our friend when they were trying to remove her.

They were trying to shut me up too.

She has a JR (Judicial Review) in.

The flight is tonight at 23:30, from an army base. That is what they do: it isn't in the proper airport, it is at the cargo bit of the airport or at an army base.

I'm tired of this trauma. I've been through too much trauma. I'm tired. I'm here and they won't be able to get the travel documents to move me. They won't be able to get it.

Nothing can help you in this place. It is too much. Trauma upon trauma upon trauma.

Nearly a year to the day after 15 people locked-on to stop a secret deportation charter flight to Nigeria and Ghana, the same plane left carrying deportees forced against their will. Women and men were dragged screaming, shouting, handcuffed, from their cages in a detention prison, beaten and violently restrained, to a private plane specially arranged for mass-removal. Deported to a country they may fear out of persecution, or have no family or other connection to.

Mass deportations are the Home Office's outsourced practise of rounding people up by their perceived nationality, detaining them, and using violent force to transport them to another country in secrecy.

Deportations are yet another weapon in the arsenal of social control. People are regularly deported to a host of countries on commercial flights; while Eastern Europeans continue to be top targets, deporting people under the Dublin Agreement, mass deportations expose an insidious link to Britain's former colonies, such as Nigeria, Jamaica and Pakistan.

Many immigrants in the UK live in the constant fear of detention and deportation, often stuck in the arduous and expensive process of legalising their status.

The success of individual resistances onboard commercial deportation flights lead to the use of charter flights or 'ghost flights'. These flights are bulk-booked in advance and the seats need to be filled. This results in people being unlawfully deported regardless of where their case has got to, or in finding dubious reasons to refuse people permission to stay.

For every charter flight deportation there may be multiple raids in communities, homes and workplaces. Multiple coaches transport deportees from detention centres to airports. At least two Tascor security vans accompany each bus-load, as part of a billion pound contract. Profiting from these flights to Nigeria and Ghana is Titan Airways. During one flight in 2016, one deportee who was clearly unfit to fly, having survived a brain operation, was taken to the plane in an ambulance. This shocking treatment of deportees serves to prove that deportations are steeped in an ideological prerogative to satisfy their target-driven culture. People are reduced to a body count, mere cargo.

Following the direct action at Stansted airport, the state responded by further militarising the route; we now know that charter flights to Nigeria and Ghana have left from military bases or from smaller airports hidden from view. To prevent further action, the Home Office no longer notifies people of their charter flight departure times. Deportees are driven around for hours on end, or held indiscriminately to confuse and disorientate them, making it harder to pinpoint when and where they are leaving from.

The more the deportation charter flight operation gets securitised and camouflaged, the more the state implicitly concedes it's shameful.

Deportation charter flights are the sharp-end of the UK immigration system. Individuals are violently handled, traumatised, and handcuffed while bundle onto secret ghost planes; however, we should also remember that so-called 'voluntary returns' – which over the years have increased because it is a far cheaper method for the Home Office to facilitate – are enforced through systemic violence inflicted on the daily lives of people by withdrawing public services and pushing families and communities to the brink in any way possible. The hostile environment is linked to the racist trope, peddled by the media, of "black criminality"; it reinforces policing in certain communities and feeds into Operation Nexus, a program where police hand over people who they think they can deport to the Home Office – who are intent in pursuing a target-driven policy borne of a shameful neo-colonial agenda.

All of the UK's thirteen 'immigration removal centres', or detention prisons, are run by corporations, who run massive profits from a designed system of misery. Outside of the UK, the state continues to invest in oppressive infrastructure. The Foreign Office has plans for a multi-million pound prison wing to be built at the Nigerian Kiri Kiri prison. When so little is known about the harm that comes to people who have been removed from the UK, one can only imagine that imprisonment upon arrival to a strange country would be the cruellest of punishments. Many lose contact once they arrive, penniless, traumatised and alone.

With an abolitionist perspective we can take on a system that readily adapts to disruption. The Windrush Scandal provided a rare opportunity for the public to reflect on the violence of our immigration system. It reminded us of the human cost of the anti-immigrant politics cultivated by all modern governments and culminating in the hostile environment. By arguing against the deportation of some communities but not others, we end up exacerbating the false dichotomy between the good migrant and the bad migrant. Our solidarity cannot be conditional. If you believe, like we do, that no human should be caged, then we need to work against all cages...



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Transport far from London

Helen Brewer is a campaigner with End Deportations. She is one of 15 people who face trial in Chelmsford Crown Court on October 1st. The Stansted 15 have been charged with a terrorist related offence and face life imprisonment.

<http://enddeportations.wordpress.com/>

The Ethical Stripper

by Stacey Clare

In case you’ve been wondering about the plight of strippers in 21st century Britain lately, let me assure you that the halcyon days are long gone. No more nights earning five figure sums on bankers’ expense accounts, no more bundles of cash forgotten about in the knicker drawer. Nowadays most strippers are normally as cash-strapped as anyone else. Over the last 10 years, venues have closed down as social stigma around stripping has been stoked by feminist campaigns and hysterical media alike. But where are the voices of strippers themselves within the public discourse?

The social, political and economic landscapes have changed drastically in the 12 years that I’ve been a stripper. When I began in 2006, there was this thing called the credit-crunch – remember that? My first few months as an exotic dancer were spent sitting in an empty club in Glasgow, surrounded by women with immaculate nails and teetering high heels complaining that they weren’t

making £500 on a week-night anymore, as their regular clientele of corporate executives was slowly disappearing; however, my first two years on the job were still financially life changing. Despite the slow nights, I was earning more than I ever had previously, working on national minimum wage. I was making bank, paying off debts, finally saving for the first time in my life, and experiencing a level of financial security that had a positive affect on my mental health and worldview.

It is no surprise then that after more than decade on the job I have become a fierce defender of a woman’s right to choose to make a living using her body and sexuality. Bodily autonomy is a fundamentally feminist principle: it’s the same principle upon which women’s reproductive rights and LGBT+ rights are also built. I was already 2 years into the job when I began researching for a dissertation, and devoured every feminist text I could get my hands on in the Glasgow School of Art library.

I may have had some confirmation bias, but I rapidly aligned myself with the sex-positive feminist agenda. It made perfect sense to me that consenting adults should have the right to engage in non- traditional sexual activities without fear of shame or condemnation, and that those who actively queer societal norms deserve equal rights and protections. Sex workers have long been fighting from the margin to uphold some of the freedoms that today’s Tinder generation take for granted.

So far 2018 has seen numerous attacks on strip clubs and the radical feminist left. In the UK alone venues have been targeted by women’s rights groups such as Not Buying It, who crowd-funded a judicial review in Sheffield, protesting the local council’s decision to renew the license of the solitary strip club in the city, Spearmint Rhino. In Bristol, there are loud calls among the feminist community, including local politician Thangnam Debbonaire MP, to eradicate the clubs there. Only 2 Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) are left in Bristol, with their licenses renewed for just 6 months at a time. And the Scottish Executive have recently proposed a “nil policy” law, to limit and restrict the supposed “spread” of strip venues, despite the numbers of clubs having dwindled in recent years.

These efforts are by no means limited to the UK. In January, mass raids on strip clubs in the New Orleans’ famous party district Bourbon St. were carried out by various state authorities, including anti-trafficking personnel (and it’s well worth noting that not a single victim of trafficking was found). The Israeli government is currently proposing a new law to classify stripping as an act of prostitution and therefore illegal.

I have no doubt that the motivations behind these campaigns are well meaning. Given the deplorable history of female oppression, and the incredible gains made in 2017 with the #metoo campaign, it seems perfectly fitting that we as a society should be re-evaluating cultural norms that have permitted harassment, victimisation and exploitation of women. But it represents a shallow victory for the feminist movement when the people who suffer the most detrimental consequences are women themselves. When clubs shut down, women are put out of work and frequently turn to other forms of sex work to survive. Outside the relative safety of a licensed premises (and the social and legal accountability that comes with an SEV license) strippers and sex workers take more risks and find themselves in increasingly dangerous environments. I have personally worked at more private parties than I can remember, and mostly have had positive experiences. But when I’m on my own in some flat in Orpington, with 9 lads fuelled on cocaine and self-entitlement, and no security staff to mention, then the stakes are extremely high.

It’s also a sure sign that the patriarchy is alive and well when some women insist on policing what happens to other women’s bodies. Identifying us as victims whilst failing to consult us at every stage of debate reveals the paternalism at the core of public policy.

For example, during the judicial review in Sheffield not one stripper currently working at the venue was invited to give testimony, despite the public gallery being packed full of strippers shaking their heads in dismay as their own livelihoods were scrutinised and denigrated.

Puritanical laws that censor and outlaw the sexualisation of women do not protect anyone: they only succeed in hiding those of us who choose it by driving sex work underground. A good comparison can be made with the argument against anti-abortion laws – you can’t ban abortion, you can only ban safe abortion. Shutting down clubs and criminalising the sex industry only places those who rely on it in harm’s way.

In 2014 me and some fellow stripper colleagues founded the East London Strippers Collective as a direct response to this exact problem. No longer will we be silent while our work and future is attacked by those who have little or no contact with us. Becoming a sex worker activist has revealed to me just how precarious we are made by the moralistic reasoning of others in society, who can’t possibly imagine a world where sex workers could begin to take back control of their own lives and organise for their workers’ rights and protections. In the UK we are in the early stages of a unionisation drive for strippers and sex workers, which would enable us to begin taking club owners and managers to task for the exploitative and unscrupulous business practices rife in our industry. We are also determined to have our status as workers recognised by law, and to at long last establish the rights to which we are entitled within our workplaces. We reject the shame and stigma piled onto us as we strive for our own autonomy and self-determination.

Sex workers should not become a political football. If we have learned anything from the last two thousand years it’s that empowering women means all women. In this post #metoo climate we have a chance to remodel our culture to protect women in the truest sense, which means providing them with the tools and mechanisms by which they can defend themselves. With the help of allies we can begin to solve the problems in our industry from within, but if we shut down clubs we will miss an opportunity to empower some of the most vulnerable women in society.

Imagine if strippers ran their own clubs? Now that’s radical.

Manifesto of ELSC

1. All humans are equal, and everyone has the right to become happy. All individuals have the right to pursue their own particular path towards happiness, specific to their unique lives, experiences and circumstances.
2. All fully consenting adults have the right to engage in non-traditional sexual activities of their own choice, without fear of judgement or condemnation.
3. All individuals have the right to choose their own livelihoods, and to use their bodies as a means to generate income and/or as a vehicle of self-expression.
4. The ELSC is made up of mindful, ethical and autonomous individuals, each having chosen to strip and perform for work and pleasure. No one has been or is being coerced, nor does ELSC agree with the coercion of dancers in any way whatsoever.
5. The ELSC recognises the work of a stripper to be a legitimate job and profession, aims to promote high standards of employment and working conditions for all its members and all strippers alike, and seeks to de-stigmatise the choice to work as a stripper.
6. The definition of the term “stripper” indicates someone who is paid to remove items of clothing and/or underwear performed as an exotic/eroticised dance routine or performance, to reveal all or parts of their naked body.
7. The ELSC wish to self-identify using the term “stripper” to draw a distinction between the work they do and other types of sex work. While the ELSC stands in total, open and honest solidarity with other sex workers and sex worker organisations, and has no resistance to the term “sex work”, for the purposes of campaigning on issues that specifically affect strippers in the UK the ELSC remain committed to the definition “stripper” to describe what they do for a living.
8. The ELSC recognises exotic dance and striptease as a legitimate art form, dance discipline and mode of self-expression, as much as any others likely to entertain, titillate, or sexually stimulate the viewer (such as neo-burlesque, ballet, pole dancing, belly dancing or Jamaican dance-hall daggering). The ELSC does not regard one art form as “higher” or “more acceptable” over any other.
9. The ELSC aims to inform and influence those in positions of authority, locally and nationally, who have the power to control, regulate and otherwise legislate the UK strip club industry. We wish to advocate on behalf of all strippers and performers affected by licensing legislation, and ask that we may be consulted during key stages of debate. We aim to have a fair and representative voice within the political arena instead of having decisions, which directly affect us, made on our behalf by those who have little or no contact with us at all.
10. The ELSC aims to challenge/disturb the patriarchal conventions on which the industry is currently built. The ELSC invites and endorses the prospect of male dancers, female viewers, mixed gender audiences, couples, and trans/queer participants within the culture of strip clubs.
11. Membership of the collective is limited only to those with relevant experience i.e. strippers or ex-strippers (which does not exclude male strippers); therefore decisions made about the activities of the collective may only be made by members (strippers) themselves. Anyone at all may be a supporter of the ELSC.
12. Not one individual should profit from the labour/work of another. The ELSC does not aim to act as an agency, but instead as a resourceful network to help strippers avoid being exploited.



Stacey Clare is the co-founder of East London Strippers' Collective (ELSC). She has been stripping for almost a decade, and has mastered the art of pole dancing.

ethicalstripper.com

Offender

By Carl Cattermole

I wrote this zine from pure impulse, out of pure necessity, smashed it out in the fortnight following my release. Sitting in Essex on license from jail with a Serco shackle (electronic tag) on my right ankle, remembering how to use the wretched laptop.

In that little period before I returned to London I was a total mess. It was like pretending to be OK after you've been punched in the face: I had tears in my eyes but I was telling my mates "nah, I'm alright!".

I wasn't.

Literally crying at the dinner table, unable to love, walking through woods and cycling down country lanes on my own, just wishing there was a big metal door to stop me.

The 2D jail story presented by the media is fucked up (I mean, some print on paper, it's 2D and it's sad). But try it in 3D: suicides, self harm, violence and drugs. Then remember it's 4D and extends far, far beyond the experience itself: the ensuing freedom can be the scariest thing you've ever faced.

Institutionalisation isn't just skin deep, it penetrates your bones.

So yeah, I wrote that zine about how to survive prison but at that point in my life I needed Freedom – A Survival Guide. But, listen, in a round about way, the original is also designed to be that. You see, the more prepared you are for prison, the less it will institutionalise you; the less institutionalised you are, the less re-adaptation you need.

A stitch in time saves nine. A letter to your girl about how you really feel saves nine disfiguring arguments in the visit room.

I hope the survival guide is like a Bourne Identity thing, can see the future disaster and steps in. There are so many stitches to be saved, so many miles of emotional thread.

HMP: A Survival Guide does what it says on the tin: it's a practical guide to surviving the British prison system.

Little tidbits of info, like: "You can take a hi-fi" – do you know what a hi-fi can do for a prisoner? Music saves sanity. "Knowing a few tactics to stay in touch with support networks" – that's crucial because losing those links is what distorts you the most. "Letting people know about the bereavement services" – do I need to explain why that's good? Open University courses. Knowing basic codes of conduct when you first enter – for example not accepting free things – prevents people from getting into hierarchies of victimisation.

-
If you were gullible enough to believe the shallow-fried myth of 'British Values' (ie democracy and media transparency) then prison's quite a glitch, isn't it? Prisoners are voteless and voiceless.

If the argument for prison was presented afresh today it'd go like this: Hey guys, I've got an idea, let's separate people who did something deemed wrong by society away from their families, into a box of violence, cockroaches and heroin. Yes! That's right! Everyone. Stolen some bacon? JAIL. Failed to ensure our kids attend school? JAIL. Squatted a totally empty house when you're homeless? JAIL. Painting graffiti? JAIL. Years and years of JAIL.

Even acts like murder and rape: JAIL. Err, what? You murdered someone so I prescribe you heroin, violence and cockroaches. It's some weird logic when you think about it. These people need to be in psychiatric care talking about what lead them to that moment of madness.

-
In the Ministry of Justice curated info-void I felt like writing a book to prepare people was stabbing it straight in the heart. This book was my personal vengeance against that system. Many other people's vengeance is their reoffending, and it's not productive (if you get caught) – but I one million percent understand them.



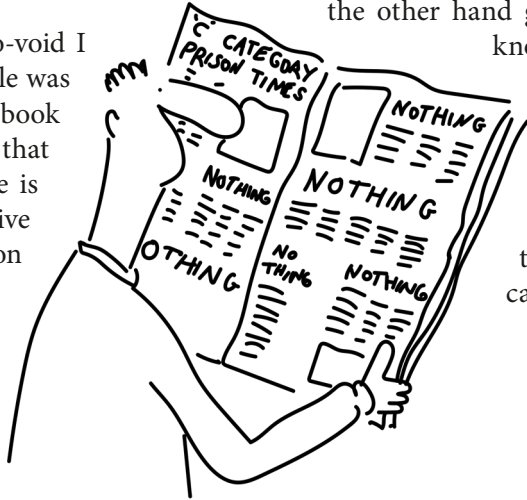
I can actually be really judgemental but, who am I to judge anyone, and who's a judge to judge people like us? Seriously... who the hell are these people and what do they know about our lives?

The judge I need wouldn't want to violent-heroin-cockroachise me: they'd want to un-break my heart; un-des-destroy my head; not smash each 1000th of me into another 1000 pieces. But here comes little judge man with his life ruining little hammer and he will never ever allow me to question his belligerence – in fact, he'll just give me further years behind bars for contempt of court.

-
2018: onwards and upwards. Well, it can only get better from that shit turn of phrase can't it? I just got a major publishing deal so right now I'm 20% of the way into something that might fly, and equally might flop, but I believe in it absolutely so will be fighting til I'm a spicy puddle of blood and cartilage.

A deal with the publishing devil but that devil is mates with other devils and they're who I need to have a word with. Big hopes. But I'll most likely get passed around like the fresh piece of creative meat I am and if I'm lucky I'll end up doing a talk at Basingstoke Waterstones.

Some people I know have been lying on their back looking at the career stars in the sky; I have on the other hand given zero fucks in the knowledge that I can steal from Sainsbury's and ride my bike... I was going to say "if the worse comes to worst", but this is actually the extent of my career aspiration.



Anyway, it's hardly a career; the money isn't actually good. I'd earn more doing my usual construction with my mate James. The reason I'm doing it is because I think it's crucial that this prison stuff isn't presented by ex-criminals who are, like, "Hey, I did my crime, I did my time, please forgive me... and now I'm going to gingerly tell you how the system should ever-so-slightly change". I think it's better to be like "I should not have been sent to prison. I'm here to tell you that it wholesale does not work. So forget sentencing someone for some irrelevant non-crime: go prosecute real crimes like those committed by justice secretaries. They should be in jail for the hundreds and thousands of lives they've destroyed". Nore that the Guardian now loves it: it loathes the Guardian and demolishes the ground it's built on.

Also. Sorry. Can I just recommend another book? The Sentence by Alistair Fruish. In 2031 the London Review of Books will write a big article saying they've uncovered the best-ever piece of underground working class literature; however, in 2018 they'll most likely ignore it. It's currently unpublished so send Fruish an email. Very ten out of ten.

These ex-prisoner creatives who come on all "My creative process stopped me from reoffending" – good on you, but I think I'll die if I stop breaking laws. The idea of 'going straight' is just weird to me. When the going gets tough, those who actually meant it will eat flakes for dinner like a goldfish. I'm proud to say I committed crime throughout prison, scratched my name in the segregation cell while waiting for adjudication with the prison governor. When I walked from the prison gates I bunked the train to London, stole my lunch from Pret and wrote graffiti on a phone box. Puny, little petty-crimes that prove a major point: the judge's stupid little hammer hasn't recast me as a droid.



Carl Cattermole is an offender and author of HMP: A Survival Guide to Prison.
<http://www.prisonism.co.uk/>

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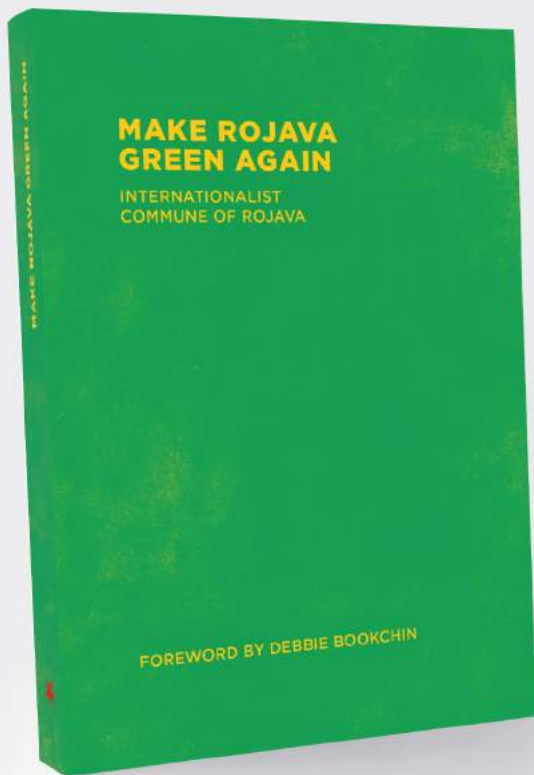
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– Debbie Bookchin (2018)

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