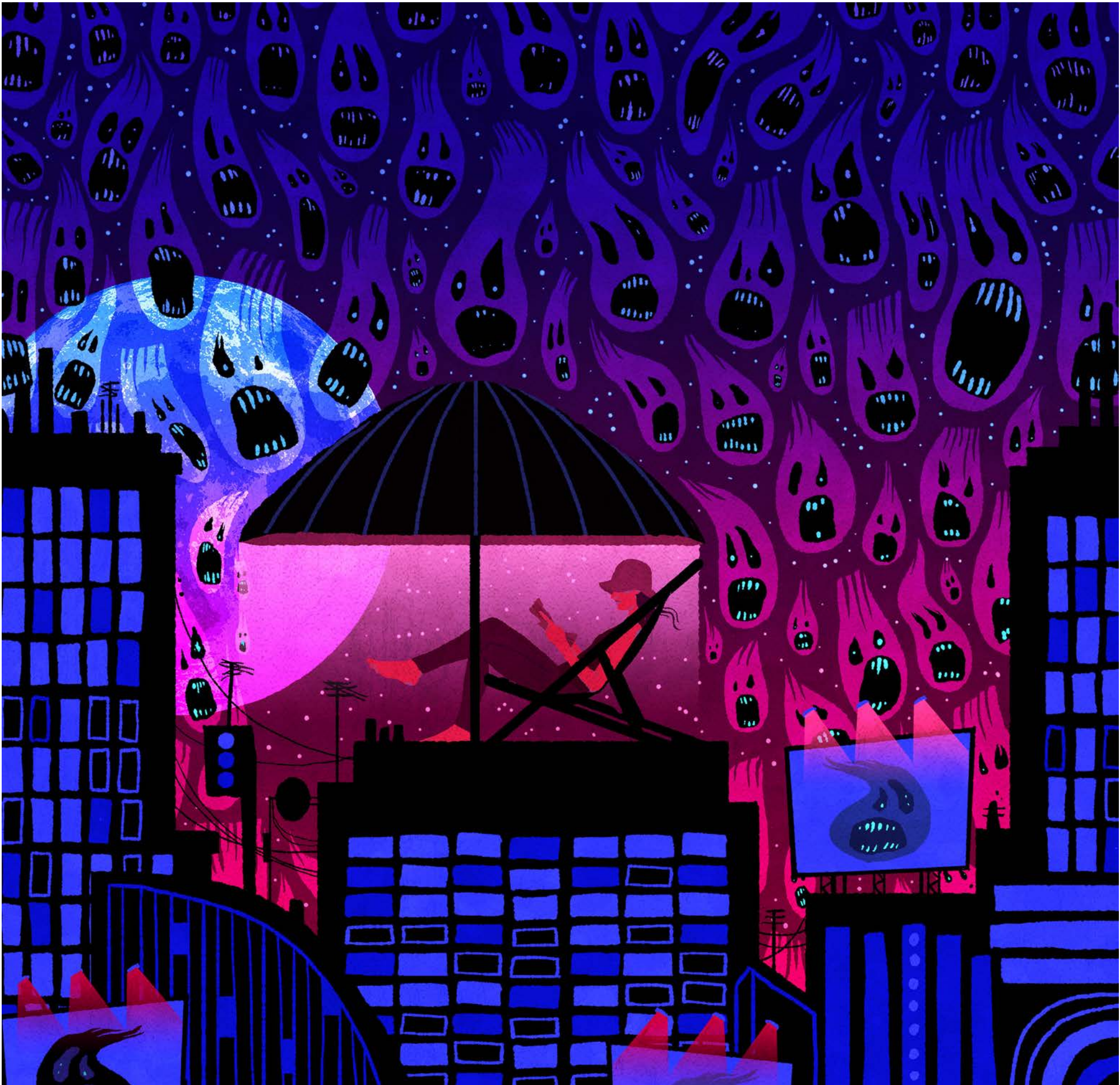




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«[...] You cannot buy the Revolution.
You cannot make the Revolution. You
can only be the Revolution. It is in your
spirit, or it is nowhere.»

–Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

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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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Paid to Lie

By Donna McLean

I'm one of the women activists from Police Spies Out of Lives. Like the other 30 women we now know of, I was deceived into a long-term intimate relationship by a Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) officer, Carlo Soracchi (aka 'Neri'). We met in London in September 2002, at an anti-war demonstration. Soracchi was a steward on the march, alongside my friend Dan and a wider group of trade union activists and anti-fascist campaigners that I knew socially. At the time I was working in a specialist hostel for former rough sleepers in south London, and I was a trade union rep for TGWU (now Unite).

Carlo and I were immediately inseparable, and within six weeks he had moved into my flat. He proposed on Hogmanay, three months after we first met, surrounded by our close friends. He even rang my mum to tell her the good news. We lived together for two years and we planned our future, including having children together. We even had names for them and the rescue dog we would adopt (Che).

My family and friends loved and trusted Carlo, and he was an integral part of all our lives, attending family events such as my sister's graduation and babysitting for the youngest member of the family while we chose my Gran's headstone. He came on holiday with my family several times and visited and stayed in numerous friends' homes. To the outside world, we had a perfect relationship. I thought I had found my life partner.

Carlo walked out on me in 2004, after appearing to have a psychological breakdown. He had disclosed childhood trauma and domestic and sexual abuse within his family. He had lost weight, his appearance had changed dramatically, and he appeared to be a deeply troubled man. Leading up to his final disappearance from my life, he went missing several times and even texted me on my friend's 30th birthday saying he was suicidal. I felt helpless and the weight of worrying about Carlo had a massive impact on my life, undermining my ability to focus on work, and carving away at my physical and mental health. I ended up homeless myself, sofa surfing around south London for a few months until I built up my strength again.

It was in the summer of 2015 that I received the most astonishing message from an old friend. I was told that Carlo had led two completely different lives: one, with me, as a locksmith and left-wing activist and the other, with his wife and children, as a highly trained police officer, operating in the so-called elite SDS, a secretive unit within the Metropolitan police.

For over a decade I was oblivious to this reality, that the man I lived with was a spy, paid to lie by the state. A group of activists and researchers with suspicions about Carlo's sudden disappearance provided me with undeniable proof that Carlo was an undercover police officer. Seeing his profession documented on his marriage certificate and his children's birth certificates floored me like a punch in the gut. It made me question everything I had believed about that period of my life. I was horrified to learn that it was a prerequisite for him to be married – to have a stable home to go back to when the long undercover deployment ended.

Finding out the truth, or part of it, re-opened old and painful wounds. My truth became a fiction. For the second time, Soracchi and his paymasters had a devastating impact on my family life, my career and my health. I became distracted, sleepless, anxious. I launched a civil case against the Met, who admitted liability after three weeks, yet have consistently adopted a cruel and adversarial approach to litigation. My case remains unresolved after five long years.

I applied to become a core participant in the inquiry into undercover policing, which was set up by Theresa May, then Home Secretary, to investigate the (mis)conduct of undercover police officers in England and Wales. We now know that 250 officers spied on more than 1,000 political groups since 1968. These undercover spies often formed relationships with women as part of their 'tradecraft', concealing their true identities with the help of state-produced fake ID such as driving licences and passports.

We've recently heard (in November 2020) the first tranche of evidence in the Public Inquiry into Undercover Policing (UCPI). Like the other core participants, I'm deeply frustrated by the lack of impartiality of the Chair, Sir John Mitting, and of his seemingly unfettered belief in what the police choose to tell him. Yes, that's the same Metropolitan police force whose officers spied on the Stephen Lawrence family, who were responsible for stealing dead children's identities, who colluded in the illegal blacklisting of thousands of construction workers and who were allowed to deceptively enter into long-term intimate relationships with women who believed them to be activists. Highly trained liars, yet Mitting accepts their false word at face value.

It's apparent that this was never about an individual officer's "integrity." These undercover operatives were trained and paid to lie. Sexual relationships were known about and signed off by these managers.

and signed off by these managers. Deceiving women into long term intimate relationships was a core part of the strategy. This was no accident, no 'rogue' officer taking advantage. This was systemic. It was institutional misogyny. It was state-sponsored abuse of women on an enormous scale. In the recent hearings, a former officer, when asked about the nature of sexual relationships with activists, compared them to "sampling a product," as a cop infiltrating an organised crime gang might sample the drugs.

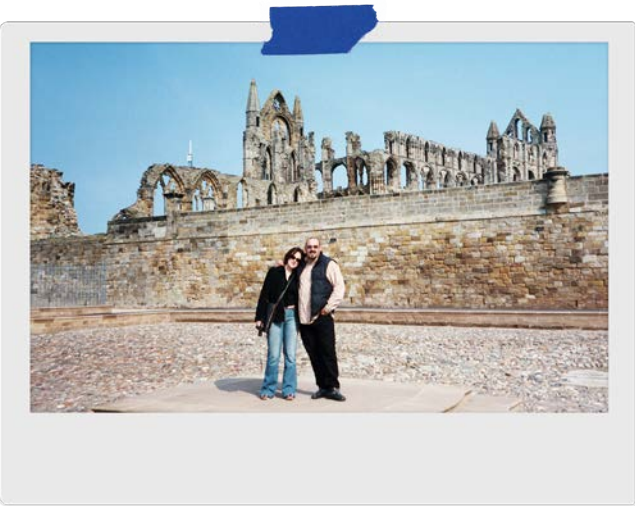
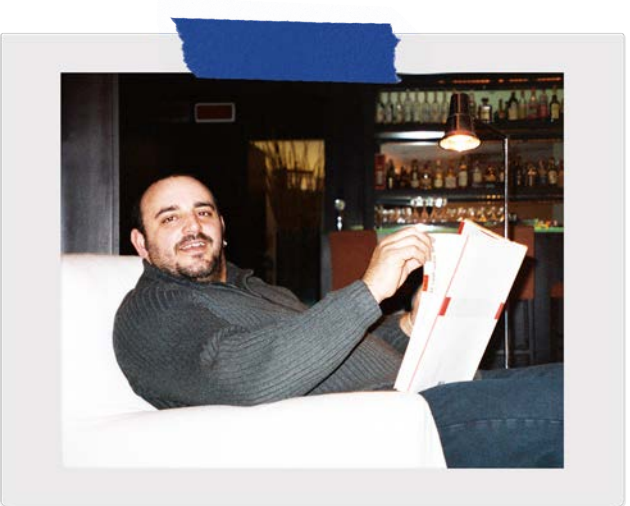
Many of us targeted by these sinister secret police have campaigned for years to get answers, often carrying the weight of severe mental distress and trauma because of the state-sanctioned abuses we were subjected to. The similarities between the other women's stories and my own are astonishing. At least 20 of the undercover officers deployed in political groups between the mid-70s and 2010 are known to have had sexual relationships, some lasting for many years. At least three fathered children with women activists.

Amongst the wider group of people affected by abusive undercover policing there are blacklisted construction workers, miners from the 1984/85 strike, trade union activists, family justice campaigners, environmental activists, as well as the women like me, who were deceived into long-term sexual relationships. We have been fighting long and hard, collectively, for truth, justice, and access to our files.

The public inquiry should have concluded in 2018; it is now due to report in 2024. The British establishment continues to cover up this scandal, through a strategy of delays, obfuscation and institutional dishonesty. In December 2020, a group of families whose deceased children's identities were stolen by undercover police officers launched a civil case against the Metropolitan Police. The police refused to comment, saying this was still under investigation (journalists broke this story in 2013).

I stand in solidarity with everyone affected by the spy-cops and their incalculable abuses. We will not be broken by their dirty tricks. If anything, this just makes us stronger.

Donna McLean is a campaigner with Police Spies Out of Lives policespiesoutoflives.org.uk



India Electronic (Ebow RIP)

By PAV4N

The last few years have been a bit of a mad one – obviously starting with Foreign Beggars coming to a close at the end of 2019.

It wasn't something I actually had on the agenda necessarily, but looking back it was a natural course of action. We were kind of all working on solo projects anyway and I had PAV4N in development from 2018. Not only did the band come to a close, but I had to pretty much wrap up my entire life and leave the UK because my visa was tied to Foreign Beggars.

I moved to India to get the PAV4N project popping. My team and I did a whole lot of prep and had a strategy laid out for the whole year – kicking off with the big unveiling of the look, design and imagery of the “living art project”. The releases started with KARMA in March and we're building up towards launching the theatrically produced live show in three cities – Mumbai, Dubai and London.

All of this was self-funded because, despite the success of Foreign Beggars, this was essentially a new direction and we had to start from scratch. I literally stuck my life savings into developing this. The benefits were that I had the support of great people and experience from my years of running Foreign Beggars independently.

We were vibing and repped by a great booking agent, Becky from X-Ray Touring

– we were gearing up to take the world by storm. We had production teams in place, rehearsals underway, deals in place, sponsors, the lot. And then – blam – lockdown.

It was a massive blow, all of the plans (and income!) that was expected from hitting the road just went. As we all know, the majority of any musician's income is from touring and that was locked off, just as I'd bet everything. It was real.

I headed back to Dubai just before India shut down – that's where my family is based. I'm lucky to have that back up and glad I made that decision because I set up in my yard, got a studio together and kind of really started looking at

the bigger picture of my journey and how to move forward. Then Ebow, my bandmate from Foreign Beggars, passed away. Another massive blow.

I'll say this, even though we weren't necessarily working together as a group, Ebow was still my sparring partner for life – in terms of where my head is at, our relationship with music and our relationship with artistry. We'd both got our solo careers kicking off at around the same time and we were both acting as each other's resource and support system. Bros are bros – the same way that we were we were in Foreign Beggars. And being in Dubai while things were happening with Ebow in London was definitely deep, to say the least.

That was just a big reset moment.

Being in Dubai was definitely something – not being around in London was interesting. Almost like there's a bit of a separation because Dubai is my childhood life, this is where I grew up. London is kind of my adult life. Still to this day, it is very surreal.

I think it was really important for me go through that isolation and separation because I'm a social person, so as well as the usual fun distractions and tour life, it felt like I was having a lot of superfluous conversations as well as deep ones where I was happy to be there for people that needed to share things that hurt them.

Being away from all the noise, distractions and trappings of London big-city life really meant I got to spend time with Ebow and his energy and his memory and all the things that we've been through. Contextualising it with my life and the universe alone instead of everybody else's life was really what helped me get through it. Also seeing the breadth and depth of relationships that he cultivated and the impact his music made – that's something I really wish he could have seen and fully had the grasp of when he was alive.



Communication is very easy now, everybody's very accessible, so it's been good to be able to check in on people and be there – but also having that detachment from the situation has helped me get through a lot and really made me understand quite a lot of things about life and death, vision and achievement and the present.

Focus.

The brainwave kind of happened a little bit before Ebow's passing. All of the work Foreign Beggars had done across the world, all of the people and artists we helped connect, scenes we helped push, especially in India.

I mean, I went from fighting to book underground DJs on a festival line up to a point now where we booked the first Major Lazer tour there, we booked the first Skrillex tour there, as well as massive acts like Disclosure, Chainsmokerz and Zedd. Being a part of those massive deals and seeing a huge cultural shift in electronic music in India was amazing to be a part of. Then Hip Hop exploded in India with the rise of grass-roots “Gully Rap” – it was just sick really watching the movement and seeing so many amazing producers and artists come up.

And that was it – from all of that darkness, all of that pressure – this was what that energy could be put towards. Switch that shit up.

There are so many amazing artists that we've worked with over the last 15-20 years and it seemed like their kind of music wasn't necessarily getting an international platform. That really triggered me to start a record label.

As I said before, communication is very easy now and embracing it to build something positive seemed to be a good way forward.

Working with artists and communicating with them is one of my favourite things to do. Joining the dots comes naturally for me so finding myself in a situation where I'm fully plugged in on what's going on is perfect. Whether that's the underground scenes in India, Drum & Bass internationally, UK Rap, being a part of the Dubstep movement from the early days, right the way through to the massive commercial EDM side – all of it has put me in a position where I can connect and elevate the really good stuff that falls between the cracks.

Seeing all of these music movements come to life and blow up, and then not necessarily disappear but mutate and turn into new things has been really special. For example, seeing Garage become 2-Step, then split into Grime, Dubstep, New Skool Breaks, Niche etc – and now seeing the influence that Jungle & UKG now have on the rest of music is something I hold close to my heart.

So again, I find myself in this position where I'm connected with a lot of artists and I can build a platform that really helps things move forward. A community. 4NCY



Established in 2020 by Pavan Mukhi, a founding member of the UK hip-hop crew, Foreign Beggars, 4NCY is a global platform and network for underground musicians and visual artists dedicated to breaking records from new talent and seasoned artists alike with a focus on cross-pollination of Indian and international artists through collaborative projects.

4ncurrency.com

Urbicide

By Christine Hannigan

A friend and I stood underneath a railroad bridge that during the day bears Overground passengers around east and south London and by night long, rumbling freight trains. It was the latter of these that passed over our heads. “Look,” she said, pointing to the shipping containers we glimpsed one by one as they rolled eastwards before disappearing from view behind a block of flats, “they’re building the next boxpark.”

Within boxparks, security guards keep watch over pop-up “street food” shops, a peculiar descriptor for an imitation public market curated in a private space for shoppers who want to pretend they are in an edgy part of town. Planners and developers hype shipping containers for their cheapness and speed of construction. Lifestyle and tourism blogs buzz about the “sustainability” of these miniature malls, ignoring the contradiction in their inherent impermanence. Boxparks can be disassembled as easily as they are stacked, placeholders when the lot isn’t yet ripe for maximum profit extraction. It is a step down from land banking, a “meanwhile” physical testament to owners waiting on property value to rise by virtue of time and surrounding construction before building their own predictable shops, offices, and housing for deep-pocketed clients and renters.

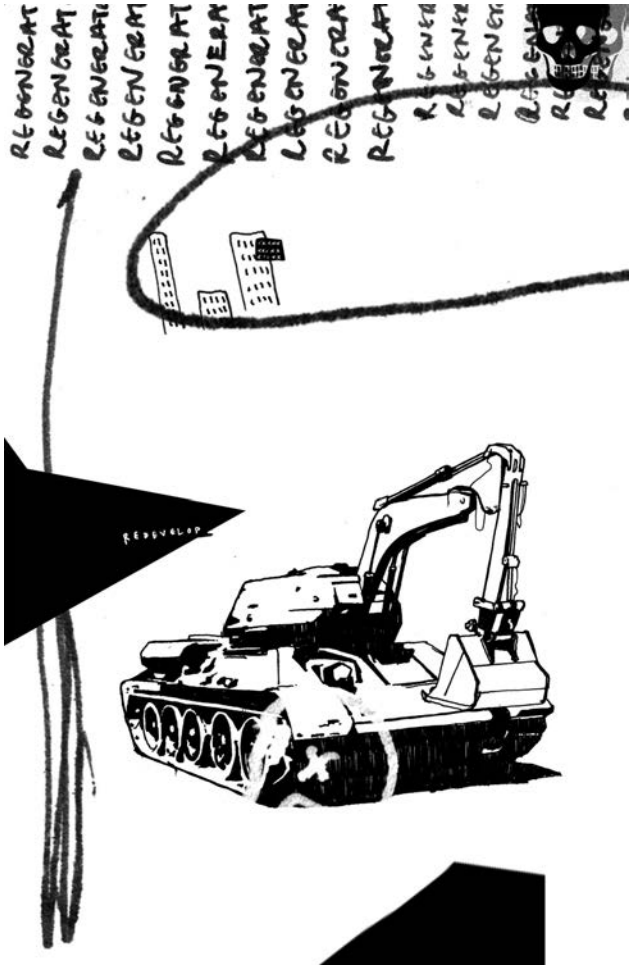
In 1984, the Battersea Power Station was lost as a public asset when the Central Electricity Board sold it for £1.5m to a developer. Its fourth and current owner is expected to reap £9bn from gentrifying that land over the next few decades. The development’s glossy “placebook” likens its “staged placemaking” to forest growth, naming the various phases when start-ups would get priced-out as “green shoots” and “new roots.” Who owns this burgeoning ecosystem of expensive eateries, Apple’s future headquarters, and a mall? You’ll have to read to page 224 of the placebook before meeting your placemakers: a Malaysian government pension fund, a Malaysian multinational property developer, and Sime Darby, a conglomerate of colonial origin that counts palm oil plantations among its many investments. Sales for the £1m 1-bedroom flats are flagging. Last year, the project was so far behind schedule buyers were given the option to abandon their contracts.

Working-class residents in Britain, in contrast, have never enjoyed enough quality housing. Central government over the past century has oscillated between deregulating and re-legislating housing, allowing for the construction of substandard homes, followed by their demolition in the name of slum clearance. By 1990, the Right to Buy scheme had gutted over a million council homes from public stock within its first decade. Last year, only a few thousand were built. Despite 1.4 million families waitlisted for council housing, the meteoric rise in housing costs compared to wages, and over a quarter-million neighbours suffering homelessness, local authorities slash affordable home requirements to ensure “viability” – the guarantee that new buildings will turn at least 15% profit for private investors.

Nested in Britain’s mass-privatisation of land is the privatisation of housing and infrastructure. Privatisation erases public space and existence. Everyday aspects of life are surveilled, commodified, dictated by contracts and hinged on exclusion. It is difficult to argue about housing as a human right when the conversation is couched in bland, corporate vocabulary befitting a consumer product. It is hard to convey the urgency and violence of a government cheating its population out of shelter when the discussion is framed foremost by concerns for a glass tower’s viability.

Viability is calculated with a model that flexes affordable housing and infrastructure contributions owed by the developer to the council, but not the profit margin. The model was conceived in 2001 by a consultancy, Three Dragons, which has a long, conflicting client list of local authorities across England, landowners, and developers. The viability model was commissioned by the Greater London Authority, but is used nation-wide to contest affordable housing requirements.

Regeneration once referred to directly funding local organisations and voluntary charities for social welfare and cultural projects.



Particularly under Thatcher’s Conservatives and perpetuated by every administration since, urban development schemes edged money and resources away from taxpayers towards private-public collaborations, and ultimately to private “partners,” namely property developers. Regeneration implies the essence of whatever is reborn will not be lost. Regeneration does not evoke hundreds of thousands of residents forcibly evicted from their homes in the past 20 years so their local council can “unlock growth” through “mixed-use communities” built by international financiers, foreign governments, and private investors recycling cash through property markets globally.

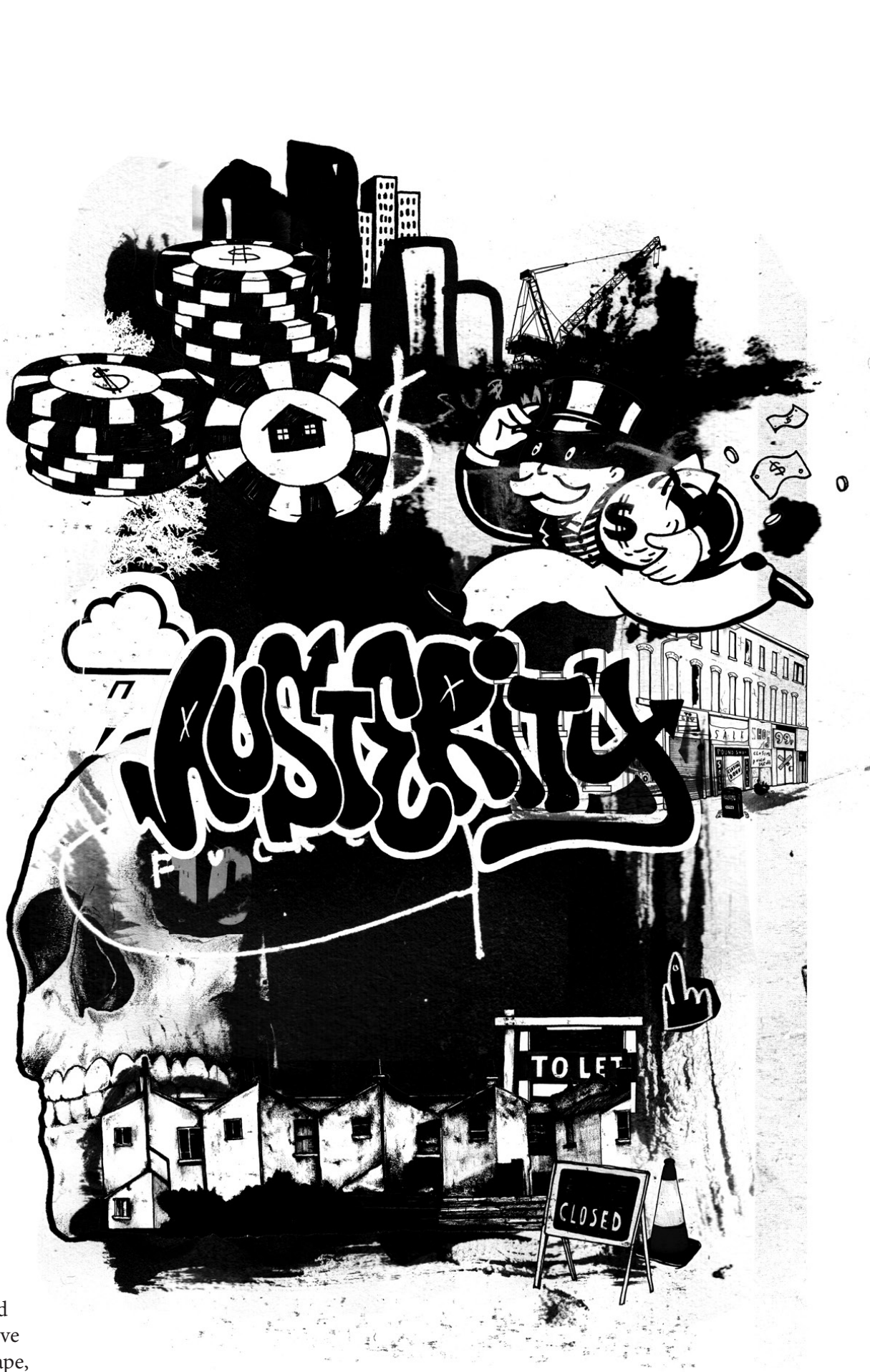
In 2015, the progressive thinktank Institute for Public Policy Research recommended local authorities designate council estates as brownfield land in order to attract investment for building denser, mixed-use “communities.” Then Housing Minister Brandon Lewis embraced the suggestion to classify lived-in homes as post-industrial, contaminated wasteland available for regeneration. Dismissing an existing neighbourhood as brownfield land is a strikingly callous way to deny and unmake the place, but councils begin dispossessing residents years before overt gentrification manifests. Colonisation by the wealthy is preceded by housing associations’ property neglect, and insidious police harassment.

One nine-company construction and regeneration syndicate, whose majority shareholders are five international banks, claims to “build communities all over the UK” through “progressive gentrification.” Generic renderings depict computer-generated people wandering oversized, overbuilt shopping centres, perhaps named in allusion to the “rich history” of the “vibrant, authentic enclave” the development is otherwise divorced from. Regeneration does not call to mind poisonous mythologies ascribed to the “inner city,” reducing broken social networks and demolished homes to forgettable collateral damage of “good growth,” victims tacitly blamed for their lack of “individual responsibility.” Place extermination is justified with racist and classist rhetoric vilifying structures and people into an alienated monolith deserving of wholesale clearance. Councils are wilfully ignorant to local enterprise or multi-generational ties, and the trauma inflicted by severing them.

British author Michael Moorcock first wrote the word “urbicide” in his 1963 sci-fi novella Dead God’s Homecoming. After the Bosnian War, architects from Mostar used urbicide to describe the existential implications of destroying cities, beyond mere tactics to disrupt supply chains. Political scientist Martin Coward follows the logic of genocide to further explain urbicide: populations are destroyed when the physical foundations of their lives are razed. In terms of city-wide destruction, the group destroyed is city-dwellers and the broad heterogeneity they represent. The more local the scale of destruction, the more specific the population targeted.

Regeneration and placemaking are farcical euphemisms, their artificial brightness obscuring the brutal banalities of social cleansing. Even to call gentrification the death of a city falls short; death is inevitable, sometimes happenstance. Urbicide instead conjures the deliberateness of outsiders systematically dismantling the built environment, reconfiguring it beyond recognition for private middle-class consumption. Urbicide conveys the bureaucratic insult of lowball compensation for relocation, scattering neighbours, families, mutual aid networks, and businesses across far-flung postcodes.

Regeneration imposes sanitised sameness. But cities exist for difference, to coalesce industries, cultures, and the encounters amongst strangers that sometimes evolve into community. Selling the city and levelling its landscape, by bomb or bulldozer, eliminates the public realm and its diversity. Building “new locations” to “unlock growth” ignores the potential of who and what is already there. It’s like pouring bleach on the soil and calling it gardening.



Greetings from an Anarchist Jurisdiction

By Kim Kelly

When the hot revolution summer of 2020 broke, it had already been a couple of years since the media finally wore itself out trying to understand the extremely simple concept of antifascism (or ANTIFA in boneheaded parlance) while government officials serenely continued their program of surveillance, harassment, and persecution of radical activists (as well as countless Black and Brown people) unabated. “ANITFA” still came up as a talking point any time a Republican was upset about literally anything, but by and large, the news cycle had moved onto greener pastures. The elite media and ruling class were focused on tearing down the few vaguely progressive members of Congress, demonising the Black Lives Matter movement, and cosying up to the killer cops that gently patrolled their own gated communities – in other words, business as usual. So, it is still difficult to put into words the feeling of waking up to the news one day that the President of the so-called United States of America was angrily ranting about ... anarchists.

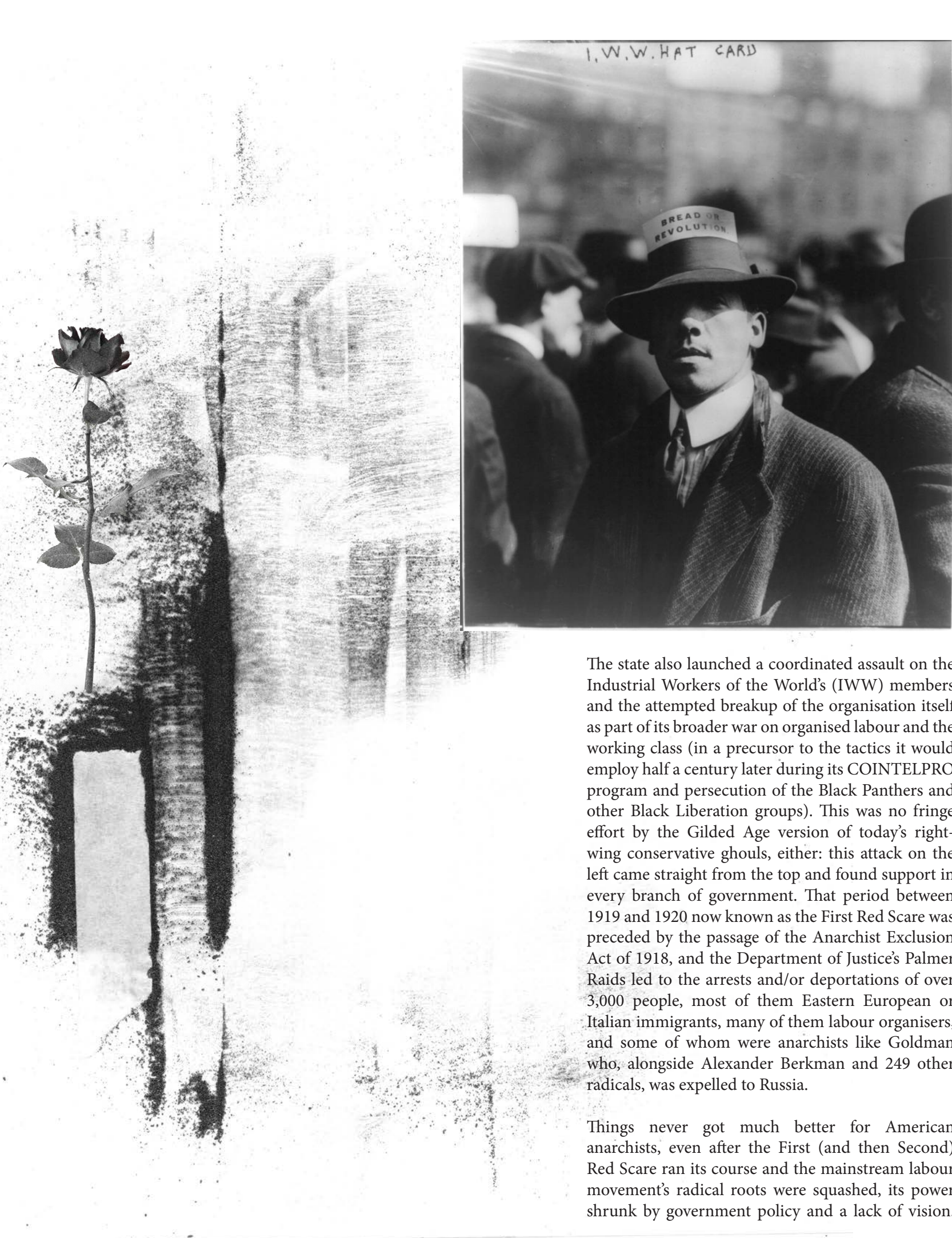
And what’s more, as the days went on, various politicians, media pundits, and Lord knows how many social media addicts were working overtime to kick up a flurry of opinions about these mysterious, violent and assuredly evil creatures, specifically blaming them for the national unrest that erupted after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless other Black people since this country’s cursed beginning. By blaming anarchists as the sole architects of this necessary and righteous peoples’ rebellion against a racist system anchored by state-sanctioned murder, these fiends were not only erasing the legitimate rage and demands of a Black-led liberation movement, while erasing Black anarchists wholecloth, but they were happily perpetuating the flawed and dangerous stereotype of anarchists as mindless agents of chaos that’s been used to target them, as well as thousands of other radicals, for centuries.

To be clear, it’s never been a good time to be an anarchist here. To be anything other than a wealthy, white, male, heterosexual cisgender citizen is to be seen as less than human; embracing any politic that mounts an emphatic challenge to that status quo already paints a target on one’s back, let alone pursuing one like anarchism, which seeks the destruction of the entire wretched system.

This is a nation built on genocide and stolen from indigenous people, whose own holistic, often horizontal systems of self-government were later plumbed for inspiration by European thinkers (including Karl Marx, who was fascinated by the Iroquois peoples’ “stateless” society). It was built by enslaved African captives and their descendants, who were stolen from their homes, forced to labour for white supremacist gain and brutalized and murdered with impunity – a violently coercive, oppressive condition that continues today in the modern-day plantations of the American prison industrial complex. Under the auspices of the county’s unbroken theocratic hetero-patriarchal regime, women have always been silenced, subjugated and abused, as have trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people. Throughout the centuries, the immigrant workers and their families whose labour have long kept this dysfunctional state running have been demonised, dehumanised, discriminated against, and tormented by the government and its racist, xenophobic civilian fan club since the moment of their arrival.

But despite the hostile environment that greeted them, those new residents have brought with them new ideas and cultural practices that have shaped the rotten culture of this country in positive ways, including crucial revolutionary ideologies like anarchism. During its 19th and early 20th century heyday, anarchism had become a major political force, with deep ties to a strong labour movement and thousands of dedicated adherents who commanded the close attention of the press and struck fear into the dead hearts of the ruling elite.

This was the era that gave us towering anarchist figures like Lucy and Albert Parsons, Emma Goldman, Voltairine De Cleyre, Leon Czolgosz, Johann Most, Luigi Galleani, and Lizzy Holmes – not all of whom were born in the U.S. but who made a massive impact on its people. Sadly, that vibrant period of revolutionary words and deeds was met with violent resistance from the state, who threw its considerable might into burying those promising stirrings – often literally. The farcical trials and shameful executions of the Haymarket Martyrs and of Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti heralded the beginning of this dark era of anti-anarchist sentiment.



The state also launched a coordinated assault on the Industrial Workers of the World’s (IWW) members and the attempted breakup of the organisation itself as part of its broader war on organised labour and the working class (in a precursor to the tactics it would employ half a century later during its COINTELPRO program and persecution of the Black Panthers and other Black Liberation groups). This was no fringe effort by the Gilded Age version of today’s right-wing conservative ghouls, either: this attack on the left came straight from the top and found support in every branch of government. That period between 1919 and 1920 now known as the First Red Scare was preceded by the passage of the Anarchist Exclusion Act of 1918, and the Department of Justice’s Palmer Raids led to the arrests and/or deportations of over 3,000 people, most of them Eastern European or Italian immigrants, many of them labour organisers, and some of whom were anarchists like Goldman who, alongside Alexander Berkman and 249 other radicals, was expelled to Russia.

Things never got much better for American anarchists, even after the First (and then Second) Red Scare ran its course and the mainstream labour movement’s radical roots were squashed, its power shrunk by government policy and a lack of vision.

We were relegated back to the fringe, popping up only as boogeymen or caricatures when we popped up at all; as the mainstream political discourse meandered along its soul-sucking neoliberal, hyper-capitalist, bloodthirsty imperialist path, anarchists quietly worked on creating our own networks and supporting our communities, utilising the shadows to build power from below. Anarchists briefly dominated headlines in the 1990s when the Battle of Seattle WTO protests and various militant environmental and animal liberation activism efforts drew attention, but it wasn’t until the Occupy movement and its horizontal, anti-capitalist organising message swept the globe in 2011 that American anarchism really found itself back in the spotlight (whether or not it wanted the attention is another matter entirely). When 2015 saw the rise of Trumpism and its attendant white supremacism, white nationalism, and outright fascism (as well an explosion of fascist street gangs and militias), it necessitated an increased antifascist response; given the close relationship between anarchism and antifascism, it only stands to reason that more anarchists and a greater public interest in anarchism wouldn’t be far behind.

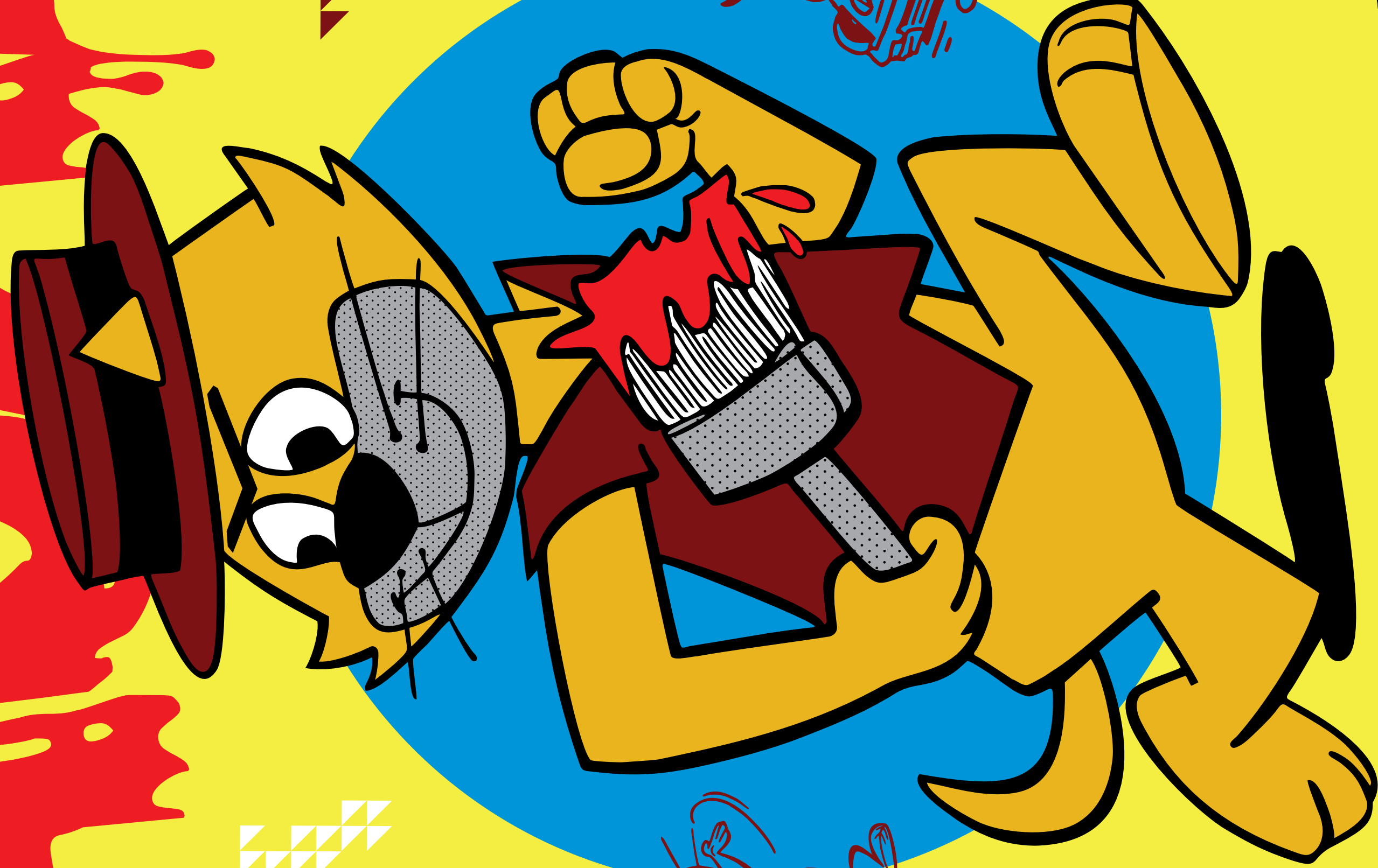
So, of course there were anarchists out in the streets of Minneapolis and New Orleans and Philadelphia protesting the theft of yet another Black life – why wouldn’t there be? But the laser focus on them and their actions gave the establishment a convenient smokescreen with which to dismiss the protestors’ demands and brush aside calls to defund – or, preferably, abolish – the police. They used the anarchist bogeyman as a foil, painting the uprising as the work of a few troublemakers instead of a huge, multiracial working-class movement that was sick and tired of playing nice. If they were forced to acknowledge the true character of the 2020 rebellion, they may realise just how precarious their grip on power actually is, and how many more of us there are. As our anarchist forebears have shown in the past, all it takes is a spark.

That brings us to now, the spring of 2021, with a new regime in power that has already proven itself to be just as hostile towards anarchists and the radical left more broadly as its repulsive predecessor. Joe Biden and his lackeys will be no friends to the left, let alone those of us who fly the black flag and scorn liberal reform and electoral cynicism. He probably won’t tweet about us as much, though, which I suppose is one miniscule consolation.

While public outreach and education is crucial, especially now in an age of rampant misinformation, it’s good to remember that for a very, very long time, we’ve done some of our best work in the shadows.

Kim Kelly is an anarchist writer, author, and organiser based in Philadelphia.
@GrimKim

PUNK NEVER DIES



ALL CATS ARE BEAUTIFUL

TOXICOMAND

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YOUR LOVE IS A COMMUNIST!

By Richard Gilman-Opalsky

“Love can’t flourish in a society based upon money and meaningless work.”
– Valerie Solanas, SCUM Manifesto

“Normally, people live apart from one another. I cannot ring a stranger’s doorbell and embrace whoever opens the door.”
– Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, History and Obstinacy

Children make things to play with out of cardboard boxes that adults would throw away. They make imaginary spaceships and cardboard arcades that don’t run on money. So many people with gardens tend to them for their produce, for fruits and vegetables that are eaten and shared yet never converted into commodities. Kitchens everywhere on earth are full of families cooking for and feeding one another because they want and need to, washing the dishes to have clean ones tomorrow. There are people everywhere taking care of others, doing the best by the ones that they love, and for many such caregivers, being paid is not their motivation. Children are taught by everything and everyone they interact with, often learning more important lessons outside of schools than in them. While politicians may try to figure out how so many different people could live together on a grand scale, we are busy figuring out how to live with others – both those we love and those we do not love – in the smaller circles of our actual lives every single day. There remain countless no-go zones for capitalist logic in so many of the precarious little communes of everyday life, and those zones are often the most precious and important to us. Perhaps nothing has made this clearer than COVID-19.

In my new book, *The Communism of Love: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Exchange Value* (AK Press, 2020), I explore the meanings and powers of love from antiquity to the present, drawing on international research in history, philosophy, social psychology and psychoanalytic theory, sociology, political science, radical social movements and global uprisings. Following Erich Fromm, I define love as an activity, not as a private property. Love is something we do, not something we get or give like an object or commodity. Love is an active form of human relations that is not governed by money or the logic of capital (it is not, in other words, an exchange relation). Love is our active participation in the various “becomings” of other people, such as in the ways we participate in our children, friends, or partners becoming what they are able to and

would like to be, but are not yet. I define communism as no form of government, but rather – following Karl Marx’s original definition – as the active abolitionist opposition to the existing world. Communism is a form of life, not a form of government. It is an effort to overthrow the rule of exchange value and to insist on other values instead. I understand communism as the movement towards a form of healthy human relations, not something carried out or imposed from above through the state. This is the communism of what Marx called “the Gemeinwesen,” the real community, or the communal being.

Because we live in a society ruled by money, governed by the logic of capital, it may appear to make sense to demand payment for all of the unpaid work done every day around the world. But only the most fundamental ignorance of capital would demand that capital pay for anything it is not profiting from. Capitalism has never paid people for their work. Rather, it pays only for units of time measurably disconnected from the actual quantity and quality of people’s labour, and from the real value of their work. We may get paid for commodity-producing work, yes, but a demand to commodify everything we do is not even a demand worth making. It is the defining demand of capitalist totalization, and we must beware its deceptive allure.

What if instead we could identify the communism of love in the relationships that matter most to us, in the relationships (or in our longing for the relationships) that make our lives worth living, that help us realise our personalities and gifts? The aspiration and practice of love relations with other people point to (conceptually) and materialise (in our lived experience) a logic of life beyond capitalist logics and monetary valuations. Inasmuch as the communism of love is necessary and actual, it is practiced in pursuit of a sociality greater than that manifested by exchange relations. It is perhaps the experience and practice of love – more than anything else in a human life

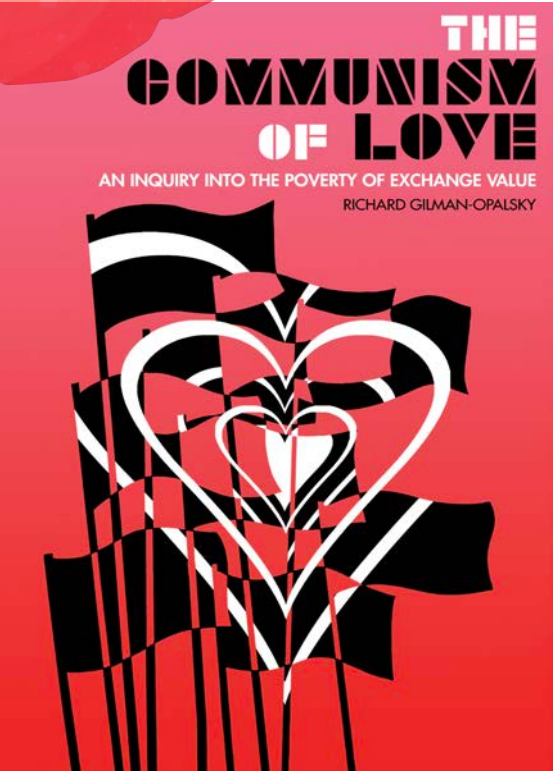
– that reveals the inestimable extent to which the best things under capitalism are the least capitalist things.

In the final analysis of my book, love appears as a power that generates togetherness and courage. This courage is a courage to act in the name of what we deserve and demand, and this togetherness is expressed through forms of collective action, including but not limited to revolts and rebellions. Love makes commitments. Some commitments are difficult to make, not only for lack of courage but also from indecision. Love often enters the scene as the substance that gives us the confidence to make the commitments we would not make without it. The key is to grasp that while all of this is true in the love relationship of two or of four or of five or more in a family, it applies no less to larger social formations of being-together, beyond the family and its commitments. However, to see this broader applicability outside of and beyond the family, we have to learn how to see the practice of love in moments of riot, revolt, and insurrection. What do love and revolt have in common? Both love and revolt go in search of others with whom to make common cause. They discombobulate everyday life, usual composure, and the interpersonal order, yet their upheavals always suggest something hopeful on the horizon.

So let us be done with concealing the communism of love. Let us reject any ideological refusal to see love as a communist power, whether that resistance comes from liberals, conservatives, or even from those anarchists who (much like their conservative enemies) refuse to see communism outside of the state. We do not love by government mandate!

The irreducible communism of love must finally be made visible in its fundamental incontrovertibility. This is precisely because everyone is someone who aspires to love, who wants to experience it, to live it, to know it, to be changed for the better by it. Love is not the private property of anyone, and least of all of the communists who have mostly ignored love as a soft and vaporous feeling unfit for materialism or militancy! For so many communists, love has been nothing but a private affection or idealist residue of religion or of secular, spiritual humanism.

Those who aspire to love – that is, everyone everywhere – must finally see the communism of their aspiration. Why? Because only in so doing can we understand the relation of love to all of the other relations that surround us and govern our everyday lives. Only in so doing can we finally see that love has to be a counterpower to capital in order to be worthy of its name.



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Retail Therapy
Leon McKenzie



No one here knows, apart from me, alone in this basement stockroom, that today is my last day of work in this shitty little retail job. Things are out of hand now physically and mentally. I'm at the end of my tether – it's been building up for years. Another day here and I'm going to end up in prison. I swear-to-fucking-God, my manager is pushing me to assault him – a beady-eyed rat-man who bullies the staff that aren't English. Shit David Beckham tattoos and a trendy haircut that he's too old for, looking like the malnourished Jedward brother that had lived underground. At this point the workplace is Hiroshima levels of toxic. Not a minute passes when I don't look at him and imagine forcing him to the floor, making him bite the curb and stomping on the back of his head; I can hear his teeth scatter like a packet of skittles being spilled onto the pavement, in my head. But I did none of these things; I just left and didn't go back. What followed can only be described as a year-long, fuck-off bout of depression. Spending the days filling the black void within me with Stella and weed, and occasionally looking out the window trying to figure out what had happened to my life.

Days down the JobCentre where my dole officer would gossip with her mate and forget that I was even there. Once she actually looked through my shit CV and saw the name of the posh designer shop I had previously worked for and was like: "Whooo I like their stuff. Maybe you can get another retail job and sort me out some discount? Wink, wink."

She's laughing. I'm not. I stare at her. I want to say: "Yeah, haha. My life's falling apart. I'm 30 and at the lowest I've ever been. What size are you? Wink, wink." I don't. I just sit there waiting for it to be over.

At 16, I was coerced by my parents to get a part time job. I think they wanted to shock me into their reality of what shit work was like. I exceeded their expectations of getting a shit job: not just any shit job but the shittiest job possible. I went to work at Sports Direct – £3 an hour and I had to wear a red, faded polo, and there was no way I was swaggin' out in that. After a few months I quit but didn't want to tell my parents, so I put the uniform on and dossed around Notts all day instead.

Things looked up for me eventually when I went to work in the 'high end' designer shop. I was there for eleven years. In that time, I could have made something of myself and avoided being the regretful div I am now; instead I learned that people who are public menaces are treated with the upmost respect when they cross the threshold into a high-end store. Vague-minded twats, people with fuck all else to do than to come and bother you with the daft questions – picking up shirts you've spent all day folding and then they turn to you and ask, "will this fit my dad?"

How the fuck should I know that? In my head I say "I don't know your sap of a dad; dads come in various sizes. Who's your dad, The Rock? Danny Devito? Fucking hell." It's at these points where you really have to ask yourself: how long can I tolerate these lobotomy experiments before I Columbine this joint?

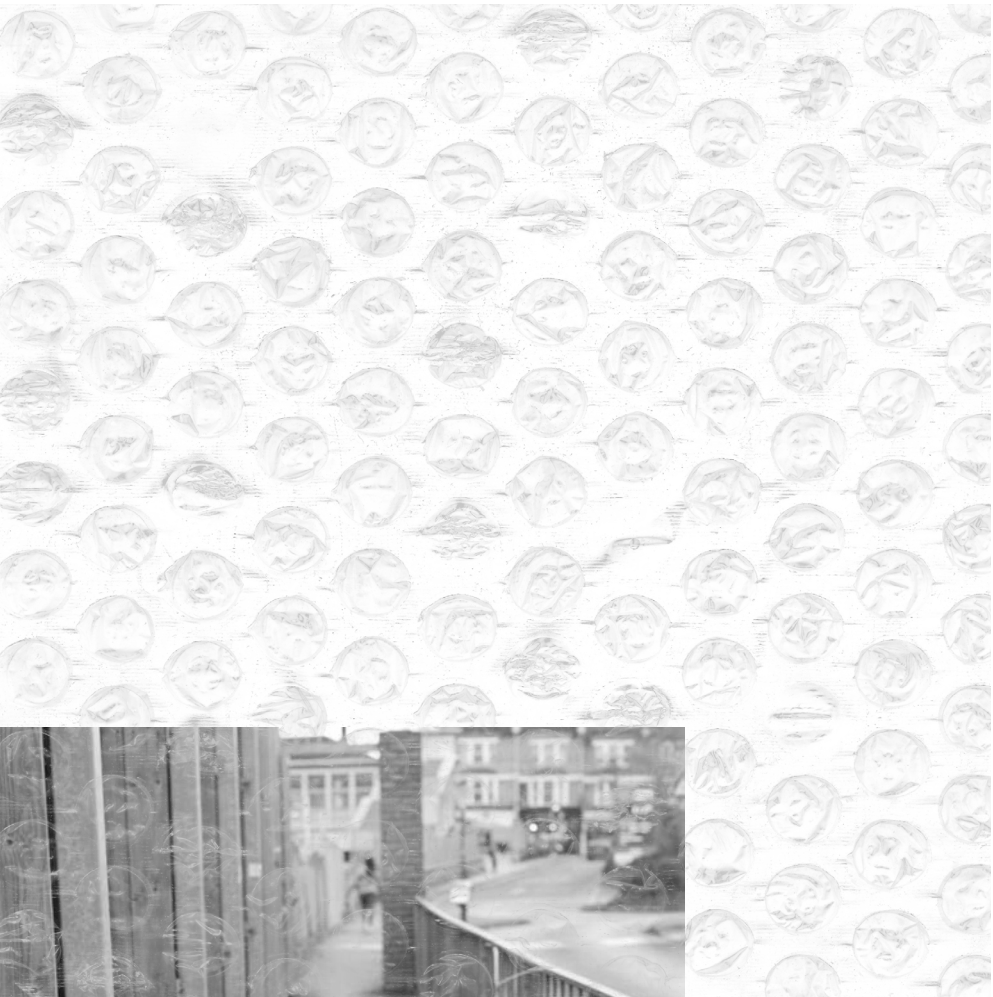
Let me give you an insight here: if you are ever rude to a retail worker and they seem to take it well, just know the second you leave the shop they are verbally desecrating everything about your life. They will be playing the game of 'let's say the worst things possible about this cunt' and even when they run out of things to say about you, they're making assumptions about your family – long after you have paid your parking ticket and fucked off home, they are getting dark about your life. I've wished actual death on people who came into the shop five minutes before we close.

It's not easy writing about my time in retail because of the sheer banality and drudgery – every day like the last, monotonous and nothing. At the end of every shift, I'm deleting the whole day from my memory. Anyone with a dream in retail knows that the dream becomes a nightmare. You're working to pay the landlord and the dream gets lost and you just end up stagnant. And if you're not careful you'll look up one day and realise years have gone by and you've forgotten what the dream was. Rarely you meet 'retail people' that actually enjoy it, but they've got masochist tendencies and can't cum without seeing their own blood.

If you work in fashion retail, there's a promised land. It's called Head Office – the Shangri-la for us plebs on the shop floor. Think of that bit in Toy Story where the little aliens are trapped in the teddy-picker game all desperate to be chosen by the claw. Ooooooh the claw. You'll notice how the brown-nosers treat the head office lot with the same reverence the aliens gave their metallic claw god. Imagine a place where working weekends don't exist and you don't have to deal with the public, and everyone is wearing white linen, floating about from their iMacs to the coffee machine. But I wouldn't know: the only time I got to go to head office was because of disciplinary meetings. They kept me well away from the Xanadu room.

It's not all been bad. You get some good mates, the retail causalities – people who only care about going out every night and free clothes. Contemporary hedonists, degenerate behaviour rises out of fashion retail like a phoenix. I've come into work in the most disgraceful states, remnants of the night before, torn clothes, black eyes and, once, fresh from the cells of Nottingham Bridewell police station. There are a myriad of spectacular come-downs, ones where you don't know if surviving til closing time will be possible. Times when some of us needed to be offered a padded room and an understanding therapist who's gonna stroke your head and tell you everything's going to be alright – never mind being in a shop having to serve the public.

What I fear most is the question – the question always asked when you haven't seen someone for ages. "Hey mate, haven't seen you in while. Where you working?" Anxiety levels are rising. I'm having to tell someone that I'm still in retail after years of meandering through life not knowing what to do next. Instead of pursuing something rewarding, you've resigned yourself to a life of servitude. And, to be honest, I'm not even that good at it. I've never cared enough to be a good salesman – I couldn't sell a St George's flag in a Yates. And if you're thinking "oh well, that's all in past, good on you for getting out" – nope! I'm still in it. But I will get my Shawshank Redemption ending. I've never seen that film, but I do know he has to shovel through a lot of shit first.



We Celebrate Uprising

By Nicole Porter

As I participated in one of many video calls during the global pandemic, I could hear frustration among the activists on the call. Coronavirus outbreaks were being reported in state prisons from Massachusetts to California with very little acknowledgement in the news. How can we raise awareness about the sick and dying who don't have the privilege to socially distance – or even possess disinfectant – to keep themselves safe?

When I talk with other activists, about what we could do, I say: celebrate the role of uprisings. We look to history and celebrate the Attica Uprisings in the early 1970s as an opportunity for reflection, to consider the urgency of what we are living through now.

Uprisings animate progressive norms in the United States and contribute to challenging the nation's reliance on mass imprisonment. In recent years, the pace of change has been fairly modest, although it has been reinforced by a shift in consciousness. Today, there is a growing coalition of interests, inspired by the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, working to challenge the rate of incarceration in the United States and promoting strategies and practices that expand the framework of public safety beyond arrest and prison.

The United States' position has been compromised in recent years but even before the autocratic interests of the nation's 45th president it should have always been in question. The United States was founded on a paradox that claimed values of liberty while its own Black residents lived in bondage and were subjected to state and interpersonal violence.

Today, the descendants of the enslaved are fighting for justice – and to be fully seen – more than 150 years after the abolition of slavery. In fact, slavery was never truly abolished. A clause in the United States constitution allowed the criminal legal system to evolve and continue to disappear Black residents, who have never been truly seen as fully human. Specifically, the 13th Amendment allows involuntary servitude for a crime. Shortly after the Civil War, slavery evolved into the Black Codes that criminalised certain behavior as the pretext for disappearing Black residents to work the same plantations they were liberated from. Those systems of oppression evolved into Jim Crow, where additional legal and social norms reinforced the nation's racial caste system.

The era of mass incarceration, which means the United States has the highest global rate of incarceration, deepens the reality. In the United States, more than 2 million persons are incarcerated in prisons or jails while

over 4.6 million live in the community under criminal surveillance. An estimated 19 million residents live with felony convictions. More than 5 million have lost their voting rights and are excluded from the electorate. One out of every ten Black men in his thirties is in prison or jail on any given day; the prison rate for Black women is twice that of white women in the United States.

America locks up and surveils so many because the nation imagines the criminal to be Black.

In post-Reconstruction America, Southern states tailored voting bans to exclude Black men from the electorate, targeting offences believed to be committed most frequently by Black residents. Mississippi's white elites banned voting for burglary, theft, and arson, but not robbery or murder. The author of Alabama's voting ban estimated "the crime of wife-beating alone would disqualify sixty percent of the Negroes," resulting in a policy that would disenfranchise a man for beating his wife, but not for killing her.

Today, fighting against being disappeared by mass incarceration and punitive policing that can result in extra-judicial killings is about fighting to be seen as fully human by the state.

If criminal wasn't a proxy for Black in the United States, solutions to crime and violence might have expanded social welfare instead of building more prisons. Violent crime did increase in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, but it also increased in Germany and Finland. While the United States spent millions at the federal and state level on a carceral Marshall Plan to build more prisons, Germany and Finland expanded access to early childhood education and other social services to prevent contact with the criminal legal system in the first place.

There has been a long history of uprisings to fight against oppressive regimes in the United States. History reminds us of Bacon's Rebellion and so many others in the colonies, but also of rebellions among the enslaved at Stono River in 1739, and Nat Turner in 1831. There were uprisings to respond directly to those lynched during the period of state sanctioned violence in the 20th century. Uprisings in Newark in 1967 and so many other United States cities in the late 1960s, including the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. Several prison uprisings, including New York's Attica uprising in 1971 and Oklahoma's 1973 state penitentiary protest, surfaced human rights violations in America's prisons.

Uprisings followed Rodney King's police assault in 1992, the extra-judicial killing of Ferguson's Michael Brown in 2014, and most recently the deaths of George Floyd, Toni McDade, and Breonna Taylor.

Uprisings have a place in challenging the status quo and establishing progressive norms, because "we the people" in the United States Constitution did not include me or my ancestors. Throughout American history, entire constituencies have fought to be included in that clause. Those fights involved popular uprisings to pressure a political solution. A famous example was during the 1960s when the late President Lyndon Baines Johnson deflected his responsibility to anchor civil rights legislation by challenging Martin Luther King Jr. to *make Congress do something*.

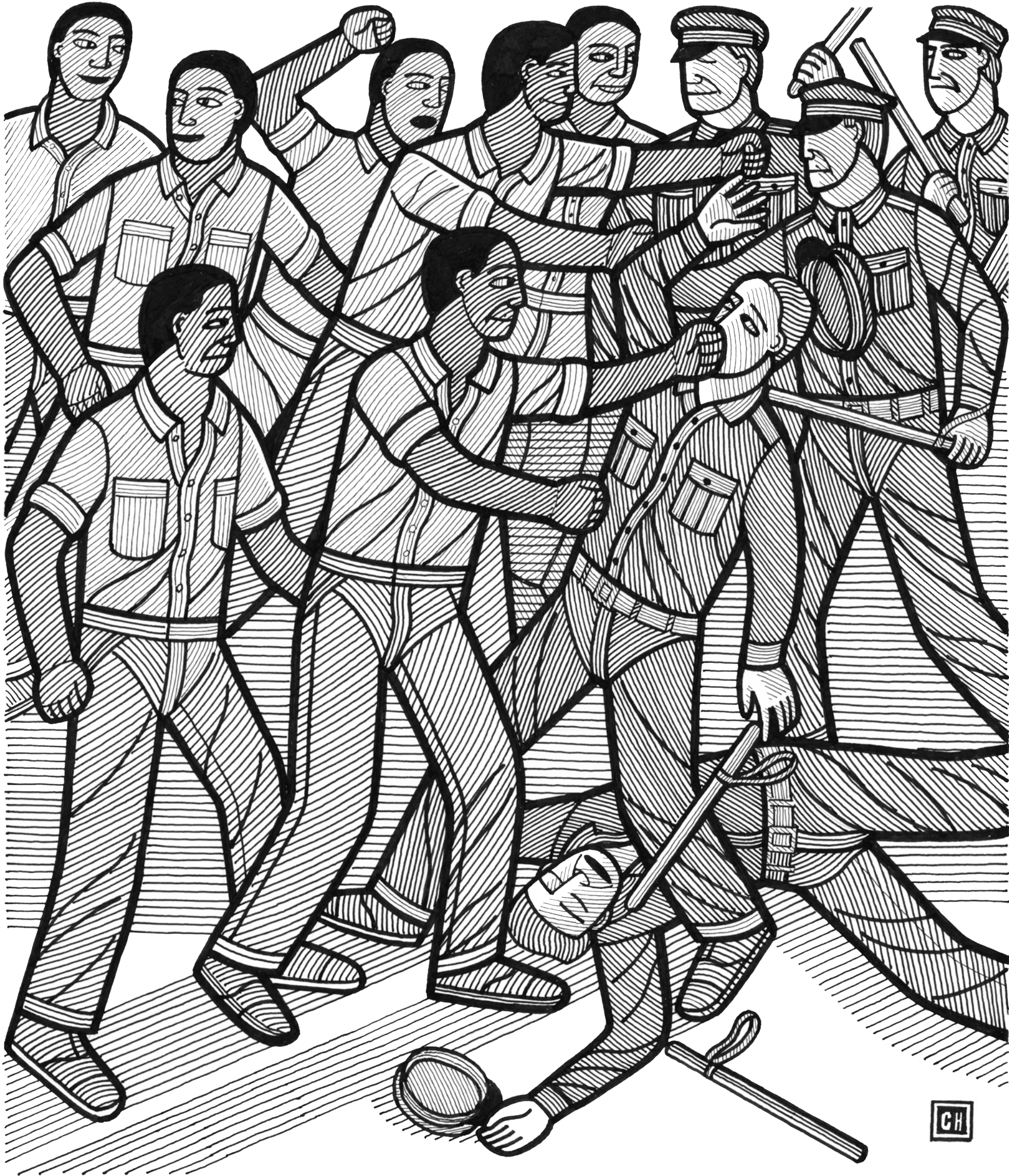
Today, uprisings play a similar role. Following uprisings earlier this year, state legislatures from Minnesota to Virginia convened special meetings to discuss political responses to police violence. Iowa's Republican Governor Kim Reynolds used her executive authority to restore voting rights to 40,000 residents with felony convictions following uprisings led by local Black Lives Matter protesters addressing George Floyd's murder.

Activists leverage the popular support demonstrated by uprisings to demand a better world. Those changes are sometimes in legislative halls and other times in the courtroom. In a democratic society, uprisings are a way for the unheard to express their grievance with the status quo.

On the other side of those grievances, practical solutions for transformative change can be found. I work at a research and advocacy organisation that is somewhat of a bridge between the activists and the academy. The Sentencing Project encourages its findings on non-imprisonment solutions in crime prevention to help undo high levels of incarceration. Among our partners are radical activists working to establish new progressive norms through strategic tactics that challenge mass incarceration and police brutality. We know that behind the statistics are people, like the young Black men I grew up with in Texas, who were disappeared to youth lockups.

Nicole D. Porter manages The Sentencing Project's state and local advocacy efforts on sentencing reform, voting rights, and eliminating racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Her advocacy has supported criminal justice reforms in several states including Kentucky, Missouri, and California. Porter was named a "New Civil Rights Leader" by Essence Magazine for her work to eliminate mass incarceration.

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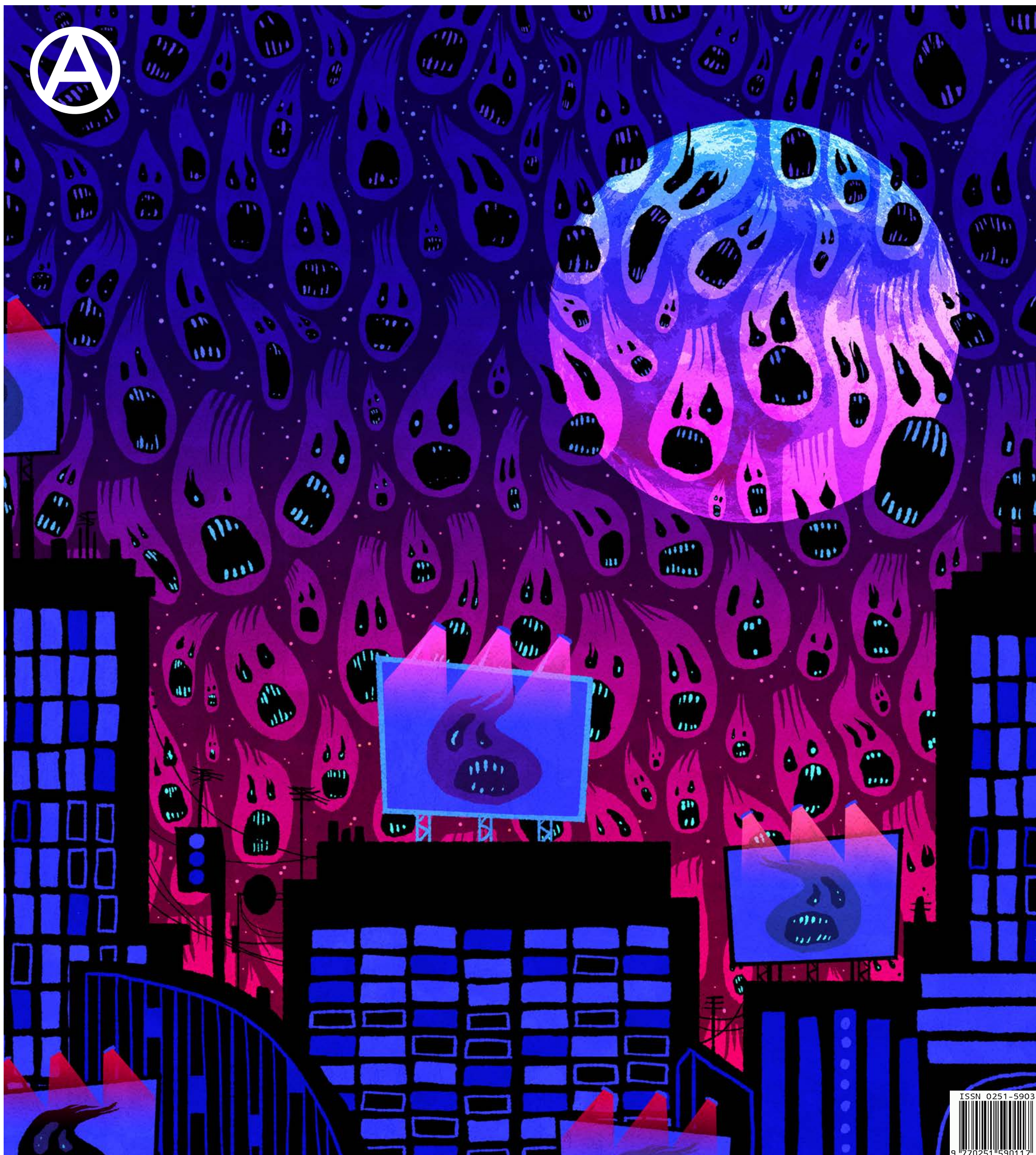
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