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Capitalism is Chaos Anarchy is Order

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P22&23 – Draw Fire, Matt Bonner, Nadia Otshudi, Oneslutriot

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Do Not Die

By Andrew Fraser

Great Depressions are caused because there is not enough money to go around. Well, as we are discovering now, they can just print more. There is no need for poverty anyway, while we have billionaires and trillionaires. To sit on that kind of money while people starve and suffer is not just immoral: it's evil. Surely even the sheeple can be persuaded that this kind of evil must be defeated?

Homelessness has been allegedly eradicated because... erm... they had no other choice. I say allegedly because they're finding that deliberately miscounting the true numbers means they had a bigger problem on their hands than they thought. But homeless people have been holed-up in five-star Manchester hotels and I'm happy for them. At least the 'regeneration' of the city, which caused the problem in the first place, is finally being put to good use.

Each and every one of us is now wondering, at some level, whether we'll make it out of this crisis alive – it's a strange new reality. People are wondering how to cope with questions of survival and mortality on a daily basis.

It's a familiar feeling to me because, as a rough sleeper, that's how you live your life. It's your default modus operandi. Every morning I would wake up with my to-do list: pick up fag butts; go to housing to be routinely insulted; see if you can find somewhere to shower; ask a shop owner if he'll charge your phone; dodge the spice and crackheads. But, top of the list was the mantra: "Try not to die today." It's not as easy as it sounds on the streets. But now these seem like tales from a bygone era.

And now I feel guilty for the thoughts I'd had as the people with their fancy shopping bags filled with posh clobber looked down their noses and mocked us as they waltzed out of Westfield back to their pristine existences, replete with bog roll and hand-wash. "One day this will all come crashing down," I'd say. "Let's see how they like it. They won't last five minutes." Before I left London, late last year, having accepted that the city was no longer for the likes of me, I told people, "You need to get out. London is finished." I had no idea it would happen so soon.

And now that it's actually happening, the world seems surreal. Maybe I'm a prophet, maybe I was just venting my spleen – most likely, it was just flaming obvious. There are none so blind as those that refuse to see and, to most, me and my homeless mates were invisible. The title of the book I wish I'd never had to write but am glad I did, for all the small differences it may have made in reminding people that we are human too. The lack of a sense of shared humanity becomes shockingly apparent when you see the world from gutter level.

Me and my mates had all suffered at the wrong end of the housing price bubble, frozen to death at the hands of greed and so-called regeneration. Yet it was all too obvious that society was living in a fool's paradise. What goes up, must come down. It would only take something global to push the non-existent 'system' into collapse, starved by years of pointless austerity while others feathered their nests.

Since Margaret Thatcher, a mortgage meant status in this two-tier land. But even that might not save them now.

But it's horrible what is unfolding. Schadenfreude is the last thing on my mind. Just sadness, that those people who looked through us, or at us with contempt, couldn't see what was in front of their eyes. A harbinger of trouble to come.

Many kind people would stop and help and say, "I'm only two pay cheques from the gutter myself." And now the pay cheques have stopped coming. I hope they survive this. I have to hope that society learns a lesson from this.

When people walked past people with amputations lying in the street, people in wheelchairs, people with terrible mental health problems... didn't they stop to consider that, if society had contempt for those lives, it could one day have contempt for their own? For all the most vulnerable? How could they be so blind and selfish?

What else can that tell you, other than we have eschewed kindness and sharing for survival of the fittest?

You only had to look at the empty toilet roll shelves to see that. First come, first served Britain. And fuck everybody else. But those same Tories who cheered the refusal of a pay rise for NHS staff, are now lining up to applaud the NHS that they have so systematically, sacrilegiously disrespected and dismantled.

And the homeless have been holed up in hotels. They won't believe the hype and they'll be well-aware that this is not an act of kindness. More shit will surely follow unless we keep up the pressure. Homelessness does not end with a roof over your head. Most have experienced many years of state and societal abuse and will need time to recover.

But I suspect they'll be less scared than the rest of you. You see, they've been there, done that, bought the t-shirt. Give them your respect please, because they deserve it – just for not being dead.

And if you can spare it, give them cigarettes, food and money. Oh, I know we shouldn't be smoking right now... but it's not really the best time to quit, is it? It never is, if you're destitute.

And remember, we are your neighbours who know how to get by on nothing, we've all stared death in the face, without blinking. We've gone feral. You could do worse than asking us for a few survival tips.

BY THE WAY, I DON'T WANT TO SOUND TOO BLOODY POSH. I'M ONLY TWO PAY CHEQUES FROM THE GUTTER MYSELF. I HOPE THEY SURVIVE THIS. I HAVE TO HOPE THAT SOCIETY LEARNS A LESSON FROM THIS.

Andrew Fraser is the author of Invisible – a Diary of Rough Sleeping in Britain (Freedom Press)



Lidl Women (a monologue)

By Cash Carraway

Ask me anything. There's no story from my life that I'm afraid to tell. Uncle's penis pictures, refuge life, pregnant in a peepshow. The more shame society expects of me, the more pleasure I take in writing about it. Ask me anything. Just don't ask about Polly. We're not trekking that dark alley again.

My publicist Meg is helping me to breathe. Inhale for 5... out for 7 and... It's Skint Estate publication day. First stop on the publicity trail is BBC Breakfast News. Meg calls this slot the PR Holy Grail – get your author on that red sofa and 9 times out of 10 you've got a hit on your hands. But I'm refusing to go on air. Haven't slept. I'm 20 cigarettes into the morning and if it wasn't for the Holiday Inn Salford Quay's over-zealous window safety latch, I would've jumped long before dawn.

Last night, I was informed that The Guardian are investigating me for literary forgery. They believe my memoir to be a work of fiction and the journalist reckons she's got testimony from a credible source.

“Who's the credible source?”

Meg lights me another breathing exercise and I vomit into the fag bucket.

Polly entered my inbox the day my book deal was announced. Delivering spite early morning as my headache kicked in and violent venom by night as the wine kicked me out. Thought Polly was 'cunt mother' up to her old tricks. Or my uncle in Blackpool. Or that hubristic big beast from the art cinema who kept trying to be my friend. Didn't have a clue who Polly was. But I weren't shit-scared. Social services had put protective measures in place for me and my kid after we'd left the refuge earlier that year. Plus, the jibes Polly was throwing my way could only derive from the silly head of a privately educated girl who- despite- every- opportunity- just- couldn't- make- it- to- Russell- Group. Block it. Within minutes, up pops a new account. Hours later, and Polly's graduated from DM's to forum assassinations – “Cash Carraway should have her kid taken away.”

By August 2018 she's launched an Instagram account called TIT dedicated to claiming I've lied about fleeing domestic violence. 2000 followers in 48 hours declare war in emoticon and dance to the reprise of – Cash Carraway's story just doesn't add up. By the time TIT's removed, my neck's being pulled from a noose. Month on, Polly's writing to my publisher, my agent and there's talk of dropping me from my book deal. Police advice? Delete- social- media. Invisibility makes stalkers forget. But 90 days in hiding and Polly's still there. Setting up accounts.

Impersonating me. Abusing people in my name. Next, she's on some gossip website claiming I've stolen stories and foodbank vouchers “from the poor.” That I was raised in privilege. Real name Kelly. Posh- rich- Kelly. And I'm laughing in-between suicide attempts because nothing screams boarder at Millfield like the name Kelly, yah? But suspicion breeds in hollow heads. Classists don't believe a Lidl Woman capable of a book. Strangers – investigating me. Not the feds, not the TV License: I'm talking middle of the middle Mama jumpers groping middle age. Oxfordshire jism developers, retired rat-racers, Ponty pool performance feminists, lawyer turned instamum – searching court records, consulting PI's. Claiming they know me, met me, saw me 'round town. My address from 2002. An archived blogpost. Newspaper article from 2015. A bankruptcy notice. A band name. Fragments of my four decades without context. Nothing inconsistencies – of which there are millions, I'm no Bedford wife – proud hypocrite because I evolve – play rules according to Jean Genet, not influencer – “THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LIE, CASH” writes Polly. Hand-ups, I lie: to debt collectors, cold callers, chuggers, bosses, interiors bloggers, JustEat, banks, TV license inspectors – they dare knock and I'm cartoon screaming “you expect me to fund the BBC after everything Savile did?” Everyone without a safety net fibs to save money, to save face. The road through life only runs monochrome for those unaccustomed to survival in the neon lit side streets. Anyway, sneaky someone's paid to fuck up my SEO. Google my name and you get “Cash Carraway is a liar.” Hands up, I'm fucked. Anal thrush in Blackpool fucked. And before I've delivered final draft of my memoir, rumour is its fiction and I'm barred from everyone's boring podcast. And I'm drinking more. I'm upping my dosage of Valium more. When kissing my daughter goodnight, I ask “is this even real?”

She insists it is, but my doctor diagnoses hallucinations: The book deal. Skint Estate. Polly. All-in-my-fucking-head. “Manifestation of trauma,” he declares. So, you can call my life fabrication - but it's all written on my medical notes. And. Cheap kitchen lino never forgets the stain of wrist blood. Inhale for 5... out for 7...

Hard cut to BBC Breakfast News. That red sofa. Millions of viewers can attest to my discomfort. I'm breathing enough to utter some promotional shit and... we're off the air.

This journalist from the Guardian though, really thinks she's onto something. Despite my book being less- than- cult, she's approaching her investigation like I'm JT Leroy. Contacting old school acquaintances, former colleagues, tracking down a friend of a friend of an enemy I was accidentally photographed with on the N29 bus in 2007.

Who is the real Cash Carraway? She probes.

Ask me anything. Ask me about my uncle's penis pictures. Always the uncle, isn't it? Listen, I didn't tell no-one nothing so how can you lie about something you haven't said? Just drew a picture. At playschool, I was obsessed with drawing cocks. Crayon, chalk, sandpit. Big cocks everywhere. Until I was asked to leave. Mother said I were vile of course, gave me a smack, but she stopped making me go on those family holidays to Blackpool and she gently soothed my anal thrush with Canesten. Then she starts telling everyone about my 'over-active imagination.' It's why I keep evidence of everything. Why I legally changed my name as soon as I reached adulthood.

There's no falsehood or fraud.

I'm just a huge fan of subtext.

Women must expose themselves in ways men never do if they want a career as a writer. More so for a working-class one. Middle-class can hint at a rape but if a Lidl Woman wants a book deal, she must explicitly declare the positions she was stolen in.

Working-class women are only allowed to write – or as the media call it: 'Share their story' – if we are willing to layout every last detail of existence without artistry; delivered with the torpidity of a police statement or the indignity of a boo-hoo scoop. That's why I stopped writing for those women's magazines. I mean, I could plagiarise Camus' L'Etranger, but a journalist of the déclassé would only edit it to pityingly read “Didn't realise I was being groomed, that's why I'm sharing my story”.

The Guardian's investigation fizzled out when their journalist put me and my daughter in danger. Believing the malicious testimony of the 'credible source' who claimed my poverty and experience of domestic violence a lie – the journalist contacted the man we'd run to the refuge from, severing years of systems set up to protect us by social services and Women's Aid.

We were forced into hiding.

Pulled the book's high-profile publicity campaign.

Gatekeeping complete.

The 'credible source'? Polly. Her identity was outed in a racism scandal months later. Some lockjaw supremacist, popular on the 'mummy influencer' scene with a book deal on the same publisher as mine. Turns out she was the one living the lie.



Cash Carraway is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter, author and television producer. Her most recent book is Skint Estate (Penguin Random House). Her second book Fleshpot (Penguin Random House) is scheduled for publication in 2022.

cashcarraway.com

The Continuing Adventures of the Yes Women

By Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber

On November 9, the newly formed Yes Women art group crashed the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall celebrations at Alexanderplatz (an event attended by almost no one), by projecting an image of six of the 300,000 divorced women from the former GDR who had been robbed of their pensions.

Despite the widespread impression that the impoverished East, still limping from their former oppression under Communism, has been sucking up money and resources from the prosperous democratic West for the last 30 years, this is certainly not the way most East Germans have experienced things. In practice, promises of freedom, equality, and brotherhood turned out to mean deindustrialisation, as 4,000 factories were closed. Those with secure wage labour jobs were thrown into precarity; most middle-class GDR residents and almost all highly trained professionals either moved to the West or were reduced to low-paid “service workers.” Where once children in the GDR were taught to see themselves as heirs to the anti-fascist resistance, now they are taught to internalise a sense of collective pan-German guilt. Teaching people to see themselves as the heirs of Nazis has had the paradoxical effect of turning many into actual Nazis, as the resulting climate of disillusionment and bitterness is cleverly manipulated by right-wing parties to increase hatred of strangers, accused of stealing jobs.

“Normalcy” has turned out to be a very unpleasant experience. Perhaps the greatest victims were hundreds of East German women who were deprived of a significant proportion of their pensions – and are still living, in most cases, in dire poverty – because they had been divorced.

We tend to think of East Germany mainly as a state controlled by secret police but in many ways its social legislation was far more progressive than in the “democratic” West. This is particularly true when it comes to gender equality. In the 1970s, for instance, when West German women still needed their husband’s written permission to get a job or even buy a car, East German women were not only guaranteed penalty-free divorce, but the care work they had spent on their families was calculated into their pensions.

With reunification, this was no longer the case; however, where a West German woman who had divorced received a portion of their husband’s pension, an East German woman didn’t get that either.

For 30 years now, these women have been fighting for their rights. They have gone through every possible political and legal channel; participated in innumerable demonstrations and petitions; even managed to get the UN to demand compensation. The German government has remained adamant. Many women activists report officials who’ve literally laughed in their faces, as they delay and postpone – basically, waiting for them to die. And die they have. Thirty years ago, there were 800,000 of these women. Today, there are roughly 300,000 left.

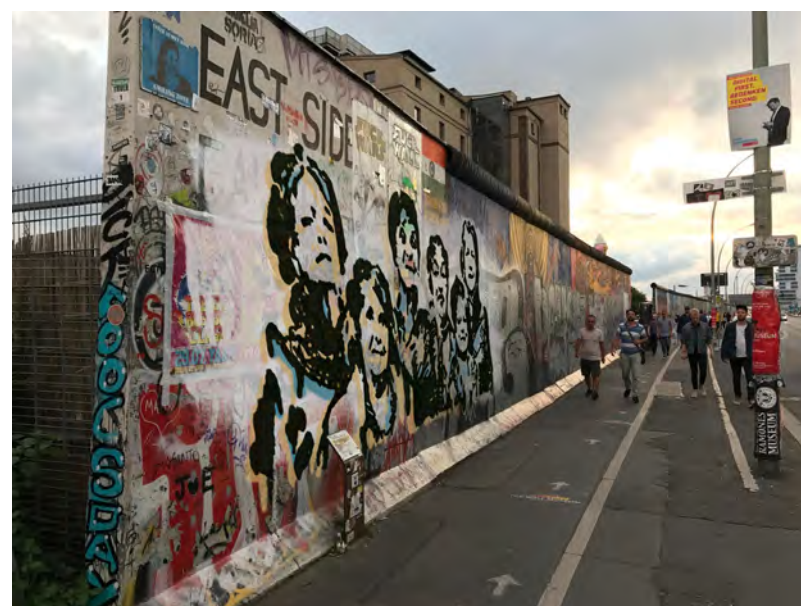
It’s not just politicians. Most of the press, and thus the educated public, doesn’t take their cause particularly seriously. You can still read columns in German newspapers that effectively say, “darlings, what do you want from us? You want the best of both worlds, to pursue an ‘abnormal’ lifestyle and then let the rest of us take care of you? If you’d pursued a normal life, you wouldn’t have these problems.”

The Yes Women

The Yes Women were formed after a long series of brainstorming sessions (involving, among others, a member of the famous activist spoof artists the Yes Men) trying to figure out a way to change German people’s minds about this issue.

Most of us were artists. But what can artists do about a situation like this? Anything? We tried to apply for grants. That didn’t work out very well. We imagined a fabulous parade with costumes provided by Vivienne Westwood during German fashion week.

She told us she was deeply moved by their situation but had to concentrate all her energy on climate change. Several equally desperate attempts to advance the project failed.



So, we created the Yes Women. As the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall approached, we decided to take our own projection to Alexanderplatz, in the very centre of Berlin.

Photographer Anastasia Khoroshilova visited Malderburg to take pictures of women’s association activists; a designer from Riga, Lyudmila Ivakina, helped to make a poster based on sketches by Nika Dubrovsky. David Graeber came up with a slogan. So it happened that in the guerrilla projection on the day of German reunification, one American and two Russians found themselves on a desperately dark and empty Alexanderplatz, in former East Berlin, in the midst of the official laser show full of explosive events and very large talking heads, stood with an inexpensive handheld projector projecting a collage of divorced GDR women-activists standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a slogan: “Never mind us!”

Almost everyone ignored us. A few smiled in vague support. At least we were a little more interesting than the vast heroic tableaux over their heads, which for Easterners mainly spoke to broken promises. Then we wrote a piece in ArtNet describing our intervention.

It’s not clear whether it will make a practical difference. It might. But the women we worked with always stressed to us this wasn’t just an issue of material well-being. It’s a matter of justice. How is it that, in a society that is one of the wealthiest, and claims to be one of the most socially enlightened countries in the world, such things are possible? Women from the association told us several times that even if they do get reasonable compensation, we must never forget the 500,000 women who have died in the past 30 years who will never see the “celebration of justice.”

One hesitates to use disease as a metaphor, especially in this moment in history, but cruelty and indifference really is a bit like an infection: it is a violation of social trust that ensures the cruelty will reappear, perhaps in entirely unexpected ways. Taking care of the elderly and abandoned is ultimately taking care of ourselves. This is why the Yes Women group adopts slightly different tactics than our namesakes and inspiration.

The Yes Men are heroic figures, who practice what’s sometimes called “subversive affirmation,” driving prevailing ideas to their apparently ridiculous conclusions.

The Yes Women in contrast practice sincerity and straightforwardness in a context of increasing desperation – as in the graffiti on the remains of the Berlin Wall, represented here, which shows a portrait of 6 members of a group of women divorced in the former GDR. Like the Yes Men, we are trying to use artistic tools to bring about concrete social change; but we’re doing so not by a spoof, or even quite a stunt, but by drawing attention to the women’s history, to reach the heart of every German, European and, ultimately, world citizen.



Where do we go from here? We’d like to put into question the very idea of art. How does it create the public space in which it is understood and interpreted? How might it do so differently? What sorts of artistic intervention might cause people to ask these questions in a way that can’t be recuperated by curators and galleries as just another marketable commodity? There’s an old joke that, in the Spanish civil war, the anarchists might have lost all the battles, but they had all the best songs. But for that very reason, in the end, in a way, they won. What sort of songs might we sing today, what can we spray on a real or imaginary wall, that will create a space in which the same people currently shrugging their shoulders at the plight of such women might actually begin to care?



Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber are founding members of the Yes Women.

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Anarchy in the UK

By Ruth Kinna

The Sex Pistols' anthem, once so central to anarchist imagery, used to provoke outrage and delight. Now it's part of the cultural landscape, maybe still capable of raising a nostalgic grin but, for a whole new generation, quintessentially 70s. The historicising of the past is not the worst kind of put down, but it's sobering to witness the recategorisation of rebelliousness. In the case of the Sex Pistols, the relationship between the band and punk was always overplayed, especially by the tabloids. Phony disgust with punk aesthetics and profanities uttered on tea-time TV was the easiest sell: why bother looking at any punk-inspired movements? When in 2012 John Lydon said he'd never been an anarchist, who cared? No one in Fleet Street had been interested in the politics anyway.

Seen through the spectacle of the Sex Pistols' raucous rise, and dramatic fall, anarchism's history in the UK seems very short; however, the saga of the band is no more reliable as a guide to anarchism's past than it is to the rise and rise of punk. In fact, there is a strong tie between punk and anarchism. And it's part of a magnificent, sustained story of rebellion, creativity, solidarity and defiance.

Starting points are usually arbitrary and often misleading, but it's standard practice to kick-off the history of anarchy in the UK with William Godwin, the eighteenth-century seditious philosopher, pamphleteer and novelist. Today, when he's remembered at all, it's usually as a footnote to the life of Mary Wollstonecraft, the republican feminist author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, or as the father of Frankenstein's creator, Mary Shelley. But in the years following the French Revolution he was a prominent intellectual and fearless government critic: author of *Political Justice*, a book that exposed the tyranny of all religious and political institutions, and *Caleb Williams*, a novel that brilliantly described the injustice and terrors of arbitrary rule.

Godwin didn't call himself an anarchist. Like his son-in-law, Percy Bysshe Shelley, he associated 'anarchy' with disorder. The difference between them was that Godwin described anarchy as a temporary but inevitable response to the removal of oppression, a celebration of freedom that gets out of hand, and Shelley linked it to brutal, deliberate government violence.

The 1819 Peterloo Massacre was the model. Nevertheless, the principles of voluntarism, independent reasoning and self-government that Godwin defended were akin to the anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian ideas that later activists called anarchist.

Seventy-odd years later, Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker spotted the similarity. Both described Godwin as the father of British anarchism. By this time, the UK was home to an international émigré movement, organised locally and networked globally. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* remains one of the most powerful reference points for the Victorian scene, but his murky picture of intrigue, conspiracy and espionage is distorting. Special Branch, then a new outfit, ran plenty of spies and bank-rolled bomb-plots in London and the Midlands – the Greenwich explosion of 1894, fictionalised in Conrad's story, was one of these. But anarchists were interested in pursuing the principles of self-government that Godwin had championed, not covert plotting. Having escaped imprisonment in Russia, Kropotkin exposed Tsarist state terror and anti-Semitism, campaigned against the torture of anarchists in Spain, promoted anti-authoritarian educational experiments and outlined a communist system of 'no-government' economics. Rocker, a refugee from Bismarck's Germany, was the anarchist-syndicalist editor of the Yiddish-language paper *Arbeter Fraint*. Calling on workers to organise independently of union officials and socialist party apparatchiks, in 1912 he rallied 13,000 sweat-shop workers in London's Jewish East End to strike in solidarity with non-Jewish West End tailors.

William Morris, a friend of Kropotkin and Rocker, was the inspirational figure for hundreds of libertarian socialists. Nearly everybody warmed to the anarchy he imagined in *News from Nowhere* and anarchists uniformly shared his anti-parliamentary stance. Morris refused to label his brand of communism 'anarchist,' but he had links with *The Torch*, an anarchist paper, and James Tochatti's *Liberty*. One of his fervent admirers, Guy Aldred, fully anarchised his politics to promote free speech, free love and anarchist syndicalism.

Styling himself as "the man they all dread," he rejected the vote as a pointless distraction and adopted direct action to meet injustice head-on: as an antimilitarist, he refused to enlist and protested against the brutal treatment of conscientious objectors throughout the 1914-18 war.

His partner, Rose Witcop, was another direct activist: having put up with heaps of abuse for daring to live as a single mother, she married Guy after they had separated in order to avoid deportation to Soviet Russia – a place deeply hostile to anarchists.

In the interwar period, Tom Brown kept the anarchist-syndicalist flag flying, combining it with militant anti-fascism and fighting black shirts on the streets with rough-and-tumble-activist Albert Meltzer.

Meltzer later joined forces with Stuart Christie to revive the Anarchist Black Cross, a prisoner support organisation. Christie's activism describes a good deal of post-war anarchist social action. A publisher and prolific writer, he was involved in the anti-nuclear Direct Action Committee. He miraculously escaped a death sentence after attempting to assassinate General Franco, the dictator who crushed the 1936 anarchist revolution and then used mass execution and forced labour to quell internal dissent. Acquitted of involvement in the Angry Brigade, Christie was as enraged as the Brigaders were about the depoliticised promotion of Spain as a tourist destination. And he voiced a related critique of post-war imperialism and materialism. The so-called 'free society' was in fact class-riven, repressively atomised and simultaneously prurient and puritanical: televised 60s culture glamorised misogyny while demonising sexual liberation as deviance. Nicholas Walter, who published secret government war-plans as a member of Spies for Peace, used the term 'warfare state' to describe the new social contract. It bargained welfare against nuclear technologies, concealing the deal behind sparkly, clean programmes for economic growth. These, too, were internally contradictory. Equal opportunity and self-advancement meant regimented schooling, restricted access to HR-managed careers, and income to dispose on endless consumables: boredom, waste and unfairness. Colin Ward and others dusted-off Kropotkin to present new critiques of policing, prisons and punishment, and explore anarchist alternatives in education, health, urban design and housing. Ward, especially, advocated squatting and other acts of everyday defiance to attack the grotesque wealth inequalities created by private ownership.

What's all this got to do with punk? The answer is that punk provided a new platform for anarchism in the 70s, radicalising a good number of those who had been drawn to its irreverence and D.I.Y. culture. Punk also turned into something other than a music genre or transient cultural turn: a direct-action movement committed to not-for-profit production, copyleft and 'do-it-ourselves' ethics. Anti-poll tax protests, Stop the City, climate camps, anti-gentrification campaigns, food sovereignty and animal rights activism all have strong links to punk anarchism.

Anarchists know what they want and they know how to get it: by co-operation and bottom-up organising. Doubters look at experiments like Occupy and say anarchy will never work. What does that mean? The history of anarchy in the UK is a history of resistance, not control. Control is the murderous mask of anarchy that Shelley condemned. Control is for The Establishment. Anarchy is for the rest of us.

Ruth Kinna is a professor of Political Theory at Loughborough University, working in the Department of Politics, History and International Relations where she specialises in political philosophy. Since 2007 she has been the editor of the journal *Anarchist Studies*. She is the author of *The Government of No One* (Pelican) and *Great Anarchists* (Dog Section Press)

NEVER MIND THE SEX PISTOLS

HERE'S REAL

ANARCHISM

COPS & KLAN

ACAB

GO HAND IN HAND

Misunderstanding Utopia

By Rhiannon Firth

The word 'utopia' was coined by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 novel, although most scholars agree it refers to a much more ancient phenomenon, or even a universal human impulse. The word is a pun on three Greek words: eu (good) ou (not) and topos (place): the good place that is no place. Utopia is therefore a desired society, and utopianism means instituting ideals, practices, and values in pursuit of this. You cannot reach out and touch utopia, but this does not stop it from having concrete effects upon the world. Utopianism is one of the most important drivers of social and political change.

Utopia comes in and out of fashion – I notice when it's popular again, because I get invited to write about it. The 2016 quincentenary of More's novel was celebrated by publishers and art galleries. In 2019-20 there has been another revival, as uncertainties wrought by Brexit and COVID-19 have aroused a wave of speculations on possible futures. The darkest moments can give rise to the most vital and radical utopian movements. The recent police murder of 46-year-old black man George Floyd in Minneapolis, and ensuing protests against police brutality and systemic racism, have given new life to the police abolition movement. The idea of a world without police is an unabashedly utopian vision: of a world in which socio-political arrangements are radically transformed, giving rise to a more equal and less violent system. However, the label 'utopian' is more likely to be used by the press to ridicule activists' ideals as impossibly idealistic than claimed by activists as a way of expressing transformative joy.

Despite sporadic popularity, people often misunderstand what 'utopia' means, in ways that lead to cross-talking, render particular utopias unthinkable, and silence people wishing to dream of a better world. A widespread anti-utopian sentiment is shared by reformists and radicals alike, which has inflected discussions on utopia for centuries. In particular, people misunderstand utopianism as authoritarian because they ignore the existence of anarchist utopias. People also misunderstand anarchism as essentially violent because they ignore utopian aspects of anarchism. I use this article to address common misunderstandings by drawing attention to anarchist utopias.

Misunderstanding 1: Utopia is a literary genre. More's utopia was a work of fiction, but is often critiqued as though it is a political programme. This is prudent since it contains some authoritarian horrors.

Utopia cannot be defined by form or content, because expressions of political desire transgress generic boundaries, and sprawl across the ideological spectrum. Utopias include political programmes, speculative fiction and lived communities, where people attempt to live their ideals in the here-and-now. Utopia is more helpfully defined by function: expression of desire for different socio-political arrangements. Desire might be combined with hope that this will be actualised, but not always. Utopia acknowledges the role of imagination and emotion in political change.

Misunderstanding 2: Dystopia is the opposite of utopia. Dystopian works became popular after two World Wars, worldwide economic depression, and disease epidemics of the early twentieth century. "Dys" signifies a "bad" place, as a contrast to the "eutopia" (good place) of More's pun. Utopias and dystopias are not opposites because they share the function of mobilising political affects, but dystopias are more likely to rouse fear and anxiety than hope or desire. Many of the best anarchist utopias, like Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, blend utopia and dystopia. Dystopia is better understood as a sub-genre of utopia. A more accurate 'opposite' to utopia is anti-utopianism, which means aversion to utopias per se. Anti-utopianism forms the visceral basis of misunderstandings outlined in this article. Anti-utopianism is a form of psychic repression – it denies the role of imagination, desire and emotion in politics.

Misunderstanding 3: Utopia is perfect, therefore impossible. Since utopias often take form as detailed designs, many think they are intended as blueprints. Postwar theorist Karl Popper treated utopia as synonymous with revolutionary Marxism. He argued it was incompatible with Liberal freedoms and democracy because it portrays a fixed vision to be executed 'all at once' by 'a strong centralised leadership.' Francis Fukuyama declared that liberal democracy is 'the end of history;' and Margaret Thatcher pronounced 'there is no alternative.' The argument for conservatism or liberal reform against utopia is that human beings are imperfect, and have different needs and desires. Since perfection is impossible, there is no point in trying, and attempts to institute utopia would be oppressive and totalitarian. This view assumes that all utopias claim to be conflict-free, which is simply not the case, and would even exclude Thomas More's *Utopia*, which was replete with satire on oddities. Furthermore, it assumes desires are individualised, and politics requires a monopoly of force to protect this private realm, resolving conflicts by imposing consensus from the top-down. This tension highlights a paradox that statist ideologies assume freedom can be given (from above) rather than taken (from below). Authoritarianism is an issue with centralised power, not utopia.



Quite simply, anti-utopians don't realise how shit the status quo is, and that many diverse peoples are already creating non-hierarchical alternatives to statism and capitalism. Utopianism starts from the premise that there is something very wrong with the world that ought to be radically changed. To quash these desires is itself authoritarian. Of course, authoritarians are also utopians – but the worst of them won't admit it.

Misunderstanding 4: Utopia is bourgeois. Marx was also anti-utopian and criticised his contemporaries, the 'utopian socialists,' who drew detailed plans of imaginary societies, and created communities such as Owen's New Harmony and Fourier's Brook Farm, hoping these would appeal to people of all classes who would voluntarily join. Marx and Engels claimed they were not 'scientific' because they did not engage in class struggle, so lacked an agent of change. Both Marxists and Liberals claim a unifying truth against which deviations are labelled 'utopian' and derided as impossible. In fact, both have their own claims to the good life. Their utopianism is obscured by monopolistic claims to truth. Whether claiming to know the reality of 'human nature' or having foundations in 'scientific analysis,' political possibility is set in advance rather than created by communities.

Misunderstanding 5: Utopia is located in the future. Recently, an anarchist told me he wasn't interested in thinking about utopia because anarchism ought to be concerned with practical action in the here-and-now. Yet utopia is not essentially of the future. During the colonial era, the predatory frontiers of Western desire were more often dislocated in space than time: More's Utopia was located on a faraway island. Christian utopias looked back to a 'Golden Age.' Anarchists and utopian communards share a prefigurative vision: their hopes and desires are forward-looking, yet their means of change starts in the present through grassroots change, like mutual aid or permaculture gardens. Anarchists have also written awesome fictional utopias, which reimagine the scale of political community as smaller and less alienated. Rather than unitary blueprints they are replete with difference, diversity and choice – for example, P.M.'s *bolo'bolo*.

Anti-authoritarian utopias explore how different desires can coexist without oppression and exclusion. Utopianism serves a political and pedagogical purpose: *the articulation and education of desire*. Utopia creates an estranged no-place where normal rules do not apply: we can play with ideas for sociopolitical arrangements in a space free from authoritarian constraints, norms and codes.



Representative democracy, despite its relative merits, shares with authoritarianism a reliance on constitutive exclusion: somebody's desires must be suppressed and excluded to maintain political coherence. Utopias are one way in which repressed desires surface, and many critical and anti-authoritarian utopias attempt to construct worlds where everyone's desires can be heard through direct democracy in the present; however, all utopias need some vision for the future, even if constantly negotiated and shifting. Visions need not be authoritarian, and many misunderstandings are about size. Those who misunderstand utopianism as authoritarian assume the nation state is the essential territorial scale for organising our lives, and that the gigantism of capitalist technology, infrastructure and modes of transport must remain. Nation states, nuclear power plants and air travel do indeed require centralised hierarchical structures to run them, and this risks authoritarianism, as control and technical knowledge are removed from communities by design. Utopia creates space to think differently: when utopias are small-scale, the modes of change they espouse include degrowth, commoning, direct democracy and mutual aid – and the forms of resistance required to defend these.

Rhiannon Firth is part-time Researcher in Sociology at the University of Essex, and the rest of the time she does independent research and writing. She works on anarchist utopias, anti-authoritarian social movements and prefigurative politics. She is author of the book *Utopian Politics* (2012, Routledge), and has two more books in the pipeline: *Coronavirus, Class and Mutual Aid in the UK* (with John Preston, 2020, Palgrave) and *Disaster Anarchism* (2021, Pluto).

Solidarity Unionism

By Kate Flood

Recent years have seen the privatisation of all manner of public services, including post, universities, transport, and healthcare. How privatisation impacts service delivery receives considerable scrutiny and resistance from the public, yet effects of privatisation for workers themselves is rarely discussed outside the labour movement, despite these sectors being heavily unionised and accounting for 20% of the UK workforce.

Without a radical shift in how we organise labour and support our fellow worker, the provision of public services, and the rights of workers within them, continues to disintegrate. We must leverage support for public sector workers, remind those hostile to worker's unions that the impact of exploitation and privatisation directly feeds into public sector efficacy, and take solidarity unionism into a wider labour movement currently dominated by bureaucratic unionism.

For solidarity unions the public sector remains relatively uncharted, partly due to assumptions that bureaucratic trade unions are the automatic choice for workers in these industries. Case in point: as a dual-carding Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organiser working within the NHS, I am subject to many friendly jokes about my over-unionisation. Challenging the idea that there is such a thing as 'too much representation' for workers is a first step in bringing the provision of core and vital services back into public ownership.

Unlike bureaucratic unions who elect officers to represent members by mediating conflicts between workers and management, solidarity unions support workers to organise themselves and take direct action in the workplace. Nobody "with the power to hire or fire" can join solidarity unions such as the IWW, whereas bureaucratic unions only impose such restrictions at senior management level. That a manager can be represented by the same union as workers is a profound conflict of interest that mirrors public sector struggles more widely.

Workplaces are a site of struggle, and workers themselves know best the challenges they face and the changes they need. Where solidarity unions are made up of unpaid labour organisers who work for free, disrupting power imbalances by organising workers to challenge employers through direct action, bureaucratic unions seek to make work 'fair' via mediation outside the workplace, often between paid officials and bosses, and without challenging existing labour structures. This can be disastrous for workers in privatised sectors, who already contend with alienation and diminished accountability as work is either outsourced or re-tendered to private firms who buy the right to operate service contracts.

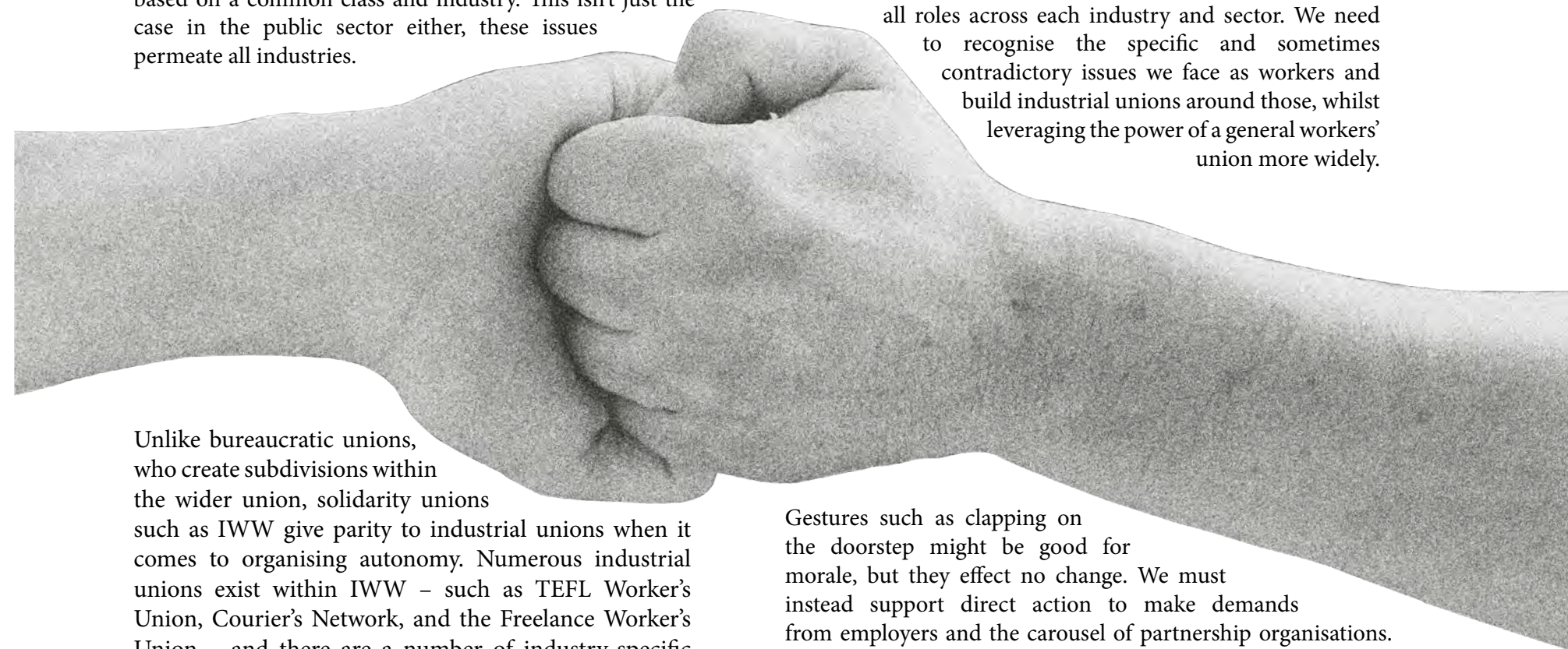
Public sector privatisation is deliberately opaque: contracts are tendered to external organisations who work 'in partnership' to deliver services. Contracts change hands every few years but their outward facade remains the same. For instance, NHS mental health services delivered in one hospital are funded and controlled by multiple external organisations. As a result, cleaners, caterers, nurses, advisors, healthcare assistants, porters and therapists are compartmentalised into their respective roles within the same department of the same hospital, as well as workers with the same role (such as therapists), effectively having separate employers despite working to deliver the same overall service under the NHS name.

Even heightened public support for frontline and predominantly public sector workers during the coronavirus pandemic delivered nothing beyond gestures. Insufficient PPE has seen workers exposed to unnecessary risk, then described as 'heroes,' 'superstars' and 'angels' rather than workers whose rights are being infringed. It obscures how public service provision is enmeshed within class struggle and worsened by the privatisation of public services, which renders service operators diffuse and therefore unaccountable.

This nurtures further precarity – services that aren't 'cost-effective' are cut, even if in high demand. Privatisation means public sector services are a postcode lottery for workers and users alike, with separate contracts within a single workplace making collective action difficult to coordinate for an already exhausted workforce who pick up the shortfall in funding or resources by performing limitless unpaid and emotional labour.

Labour organising is already arduous, and relies on identifying a common grievance or aim. Where the atomisation of privatised public services obscures this, the high rate of unionisation within these sectors compounds the issue by alluding to a collective power that privatisation has made inaccessible. This is not to say bureaucratic trade unions are ineffective but rather direct action and labour organising achieve faster, lasting results. Concessions afforded by a mediation approach bolsters the institutional power of the union rather than workers, do not challenge labour structures, and thus are not carried over when contracts change hands.

Worse, precarious workers such as cleaners, caterers and assistants often cannot afford the steep dues of bureaucratic unions, meaning their concerns are often sidelined, reinforcing false notions that even within the same class there are different values to different work. This undermines the power of even the most heavily unionised workforce, dividing workers by job title rather than uniting workers based on a common class and industry. This isn't just the case in the public sector either, these issues permeate all industries.



Unlike bureaucratic unions, who create subdivisions within the wider union, solidarity unions such as IWW give parity to industrial unions when it comes to organising autonomy. Numerous industrial unions exist within IWW – such as TEFL Worker's Union, Courier's Network, and the Freelance Worker's Union – and there are a number of industry-specific unions developing within IWW, including healthcare and arts workers. This allows for targeted organising built around the specific needs of a particular workforce, retaining class solidarity and unifying workers more broadly by recognising that, to challenge conditions in an ever-mutating workplace, we must organise at the industry level. IWW lends organising power to industrial unions by calling upon the wider union membership to offer their solidarity to actions such as pickets and boycotts. As an IWW organiser working within a newly-privatised part of the NHS, this is what we need. Due to the nature of public sector work, the level of risk and dependency we are responsible for, direct action is not always straight-forward.

The most powerful weapons in a worker's arsenal – withdrawal of labour from sick-ins and strikes – can be unworkable.

A strike might hurt the boss, but it will also hurt those who use services we work in. Rightly, strike action must not interrupt the provision of life sustaining or vital services. Workers delivering public services are not only exploited by wages and conditions, but by their humanity: if we don't clean the hospital, feed the patients, perform the therapy, people will get sick. Bosses count on the fact we will always be there, and this translates into our public image: valuable, dependable, and taken for granted.

Reversing the privatisation of public services is embroiled with workers reclaiming their labour: by making services accountable to a public in support of the worker, we have the power to make demands that cannot be offset by leveraging our responsibilities against us. To do this, we need radical action and internationalist, industrial unions that unite workers in all roles across each industry and sector. We need to recognise the specific and sometimes contradictory issues we face as workers and build industrial unions around those, whilst leveraging the power of a general workers' union more widely.

Gestures such as clapping on the doorstep might be good for morale, but they effect no change. We must instead support direct action to make demands from employers and the carousel of partnership organisations. We are the ones on the ground, who know what our services need, how they operate, and how far resources stretch. We also know our limits. When we cannot march on the boss, we need you to do that. When we cannot make our voices heard, shout with us. Solidarity should not be contingent on perceived proximity to struggle, and everyone who claims to love our public services must realise they are implicated within this movement. If you support our public services, say it with your chest: help us build the union.

Kate Flood is an NHS worker and an area organiser with Brighton IWW.

iww.org.uk/brighton

Blue Bag Life

By Elliot Murawski

An unfortunately inevitable fact of our lives and fragile minds is that we tend to take more interest in things that have affected, or continue to directly affect, us than we do issues that we have no experience of. If we're surrounded by poverty we will feel motivated to change it. If we're battling a terminal illness or know somebody that is, or perhaps somebody who has lost their battle, then it becomes personal.

Occasionally we may feel compelled to involve ourselves in a cause far away from our own lives, but there will undoubtedly be a reason for why we feel connected to that issue, an association that maybe we can't quite put our finger on – we just know that we feel something.

I never used to take interest in anything to do with prison. I spent over ten years as a committed heroin addict, and with that came the habitual theft, shoplifting, robberies, scamming, manipulating and general skulduggery. I probably should have been more aware of the high likelihood that I'd end up in prison, but I suppose I was just arrogant. I knew I was good at getting away with it. I also held down jobs for many years, which gave me a baseline income to feed my habit before the extra-curricular activities became necessary. So, when my friends would disappear for a few months at a time and then reappear looking healthier and more alive, I assumed their little stint locked up did them a massive favour.

I got arrested a few times in my teens for stupid things like breaking into a shed, criminal damage and fights, but it never got me any serious consequences. By the time I reached my twenties though, my behaviour was becoming more risky. I got arrested for minor crimes and, again, suffered no serious consequences, but there was a rapid progression in severity. In early 2016 myself and several others got pounced on by armed police looking for somebody wanted for murder – who just so happened to be staying at my flat. They tried to do me for assisting an offender, but couldn't prove I knew anything about the murder. Around that time I was injecting heroin and crack up to ten times a day and became involved with organised crime gangs in London to feed my insatiable habit. I worked as a small-time courier, taking parcels of Class A drugs out of the city and into other areas to distribute to the local users – a criminal business model now known as 'county lines.'

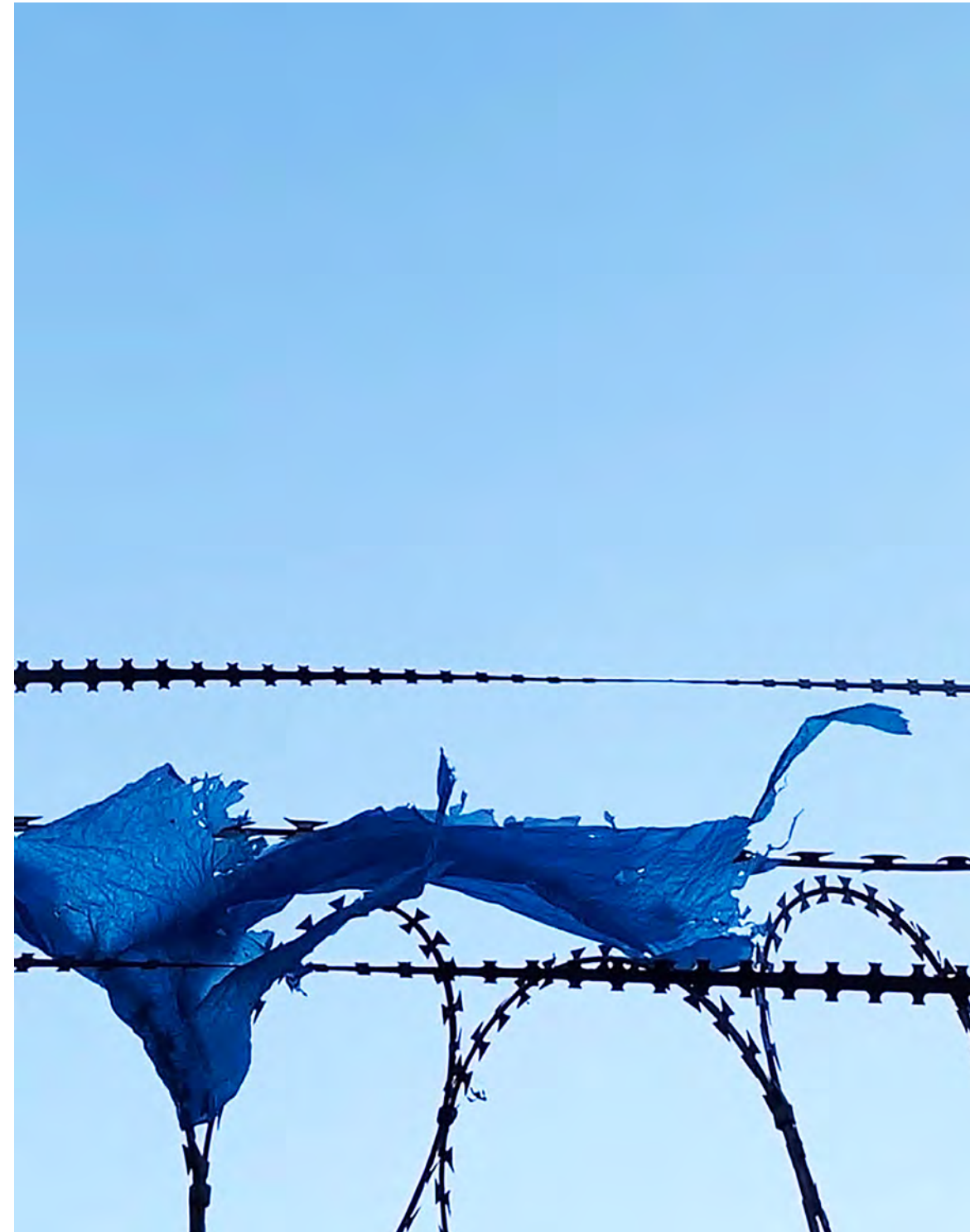
It was this association with organised crime that led to my eventual arrest and prison sentence, of which I served just under three years.

It was only during my sentence that I gained an awareness of how big a part systemic failure plays in the fates of so many lives. Public perception of those serving prison sentences is suitably summarised by the Daily Mail comments section's favourite phrase: 'If you can't do the time, don't do the crime.' I despise this saying for so many reasons, not least that it audaciously makes the assumption that every crime committed is preceded by a well thought-out and logical evaluation of risks and consequences, and that the person committing the crime is doing so willfully, or even motivated by greed. The many factors that aren't taken into account by those who regurgitate this phrase like a mantra for the ignorantly privileged include poverty, desperation, coercion, exploitation, mental illness and emotional instability or impulsivity. Marginalised communities are over-represented in the UK prison system, which tells us that, as a society, we are too eager to lock people up and get them out of our sight before we are willing to look at the circumstances that contributed to the individual's so-called offence. It's quite fitting we use the same word for causing insult as we do for breaking the law – some in our society are still offended by the mere presence of certain people.

My addiction was borne out of an underlying mental illness which I could never quite manage effectively. I was diagnosed at the age of 16 with bipolar disorder, and have suffered multiple manic and depressive episodes throughout my life. Heroin was the only thing that suppressed my emotional instability sufficiently enough for me to function, but of course using heroin comes with a world of its own problems. Some would argue that I chose to become a heroin addict, therefore all my problems were of my making. The same people would say that I chose to commit crime, so I should have been willing to do the time. The trouble is that we only ever hear about the awfulness of the crime committed, or the terrible behaviours exhibited by an individual – we weren't present for the journey of that individual, and the full circumstances of the event of the offence are only described in court. Disconnection between humans and a breakdown of societal empathy often leads to extreme judgement in these scenarios – it's easier to hate a stranger than a friend – so it stands to reason that if we can paint a broader picture of the multifaceted aspects of a human's life then surely we can contribute to a more compassionate understanding of one another?



Earlier this year my partner and I attended a court to observe a trial as part of our ongoing work as Blue Bag Life. At one point while we were there the defendant took the stand. After hearing the details of what had occurred, it was important for me to hear him explain his perspective, as he spoke with a passion and sincerity in his voice – even refusing to stop talking when the judge asked him to, by saying: "This is my life. You go home tonight and eat food in your house, I'm going back to a cell to eat slop. This is my life, give me five more minutes." He explained how he'd been addicted to multiple substances for a long time, and what the long-term effects of being entrenched in this lifestyle had on him. While listening to him, I felt empathy. I could imagine myself stood where he was, pleading for understanding to the faces of strangers who would decide what the rest of my life would look like. I'd been in situations where I'd made split-second decisions, often the wrong ones. I've been in the dock at other courts, but I could easily have been in the dock that day. I understood him.



During the trial there was a statement from what's called an 'expert witness' – somebody who is sufficiently qualified to provide an in-depth analysis of a situation with a conclusion. This expert witness, whose qualifications and prior experience read like a who's who of acclaimed psychology and healthcare in London, concluded that the defendant, who grew up around violence in care, suffered not just from a personality disorder, but from trauma, psychosis and substance misuse disorder, which meant that he was not aware of the consequences of his actions when the offence took place. After listening to hours of the trial, we had to leave, but I couldn't push the case out of my mind, and regularly checked online for updates.

I found out a few weeks later that the man whose trial we attended was found guilty without any mitigation based on his circumstances. We spoke to his mum in the public gallery during his trial, and ended up connecting with him through letters in prison, explaining who we were, what we do, and why we were at his trial, I suppose to assure him we weren't just fetishists or voyeurs. I wanted him to know that I felt every word he said when he was in the dock, because they were words I would have used myself, and probably similar to words I've used in other situations. The desperation of knowing you're talking to people who only see the end result, the failed specimen. People who don't want to connect to the human or look past the symptom – or manifestation – of engrained, systemic failure.

As Blue Bag Life, my partner Lisa and I have developed a platform not just for writing and storytelling, not just for connecting people to the human element of situations like I've described, but for us to gain a better understanding of how we can move forward ourselves. It took us so long to work through our issues, including addiction, mental illness and prison, that we had to just figure things out as we went along. We still have a long way to go to fully understand how we can change the outcomes of people's lives but it means looking to ourselves first, and that can be painful. Checking our judgements and biases. Questioning what we're presented with. Not writing somebody off as a failed specimen of humanity.

Elliot Murawski is one half of Blue Bag Life.

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Anarchists developed a body of writing about power, domination, injustice and exploitation, education, prisons and a lot more besides. Honing in on different facets of the anarchist canon is not just an interesting archaeological exercise. The persistence, development and adaptation of anarchist traditions depends on our surveying the historical landscape of ideas and drawing on the resources it contains. The theoretical toolbox that this small assortment of anarchists helped to construct is there to use, amend and adapt.

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