

base

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## GOOD NEWS IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Following months of sustained campaigning against the collection and processing of nationality and country-of-birth data by the Against Borders for Children campaign (Schools ABC), the Department for Education announced that it will end its collection of pupil nationality data. This immense, joyful outcome follows similar campaigning, action and subsequent victory by North East London Migrant Action (NELMA) when, at the tail end of 2017, the High Court found a Home Office policy for the detention and deportation of European Economic Area rough sleepers in the UK to be unlawful. Some of the victims of this policy are now beginning to receive substantial damages. Both victories and other recent partial ones, which secure material changes of policy from fundamentally hostile state institutions, came as a result of countless hours of organising, campaigning and awareness-raising.

The British government's 'Hostile Environment' approach to immigration has seen it extend border enforcement and surveillance into an ever-expanding dragnet across public services and civil society. The policies ask or compel teachers, healthcare professionals, banks, landlords and various employers to become border guards. Schools ABC and NELMA are just two examples of what can be achieved by extra-parliamentary organising that mobilises around particular areas of a much broader systemic injustice. Many other campaigns are working to challenge the state's structural violence within health-care, housing and welfare, bank and building society accounts, as well as detainee support and practical migrant solidarity.

Individual campaigns that have a clear and fixed objective as well as being rooted in material concerns and needs, have a solid benefit in that the message and method of campaigning can appear more focused,

proximate and, at least potentially, solvable. These conditions are often not so easily reconciled among other forms of organising around a broader combination of oppressions. Peer-to-peer and mutual aid, often working through many months and years of casework and solidarity activity, can often be quite messy to unpick and silo into a particular action or policy. This method of organising, which moves within and without more formalised political spaces - encompassing support through legal processes, access to housing, social care, food and medication - can be difficult to quantify and make visible, but it has a strong multiplier effect. The development of collective means for engaging with and making demands on institutions hostile to providing these resources, builds a general literacy of the specificities of their oppressive functions, developing local knowledges and methods of resistance.

In a 1992 issue of Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF), anti-fascist organisations are urged to embed themselves in such local knowledges. In their own time, they refer back to earlier lessons in anti-fascist organising:

*This was summed up in 1978 by a member of the Bengali Youth Association, an organisation set up to contest the most extreme and consistent racial violence and harassment in Britain at the time. Having just witnessed yet another left rally and march to remove the NF paper-sellers from Brick Lane's Sunday market, he told the organisers as they left for home that night, 'Now you've had your curries and cleared your consciences, fuck off back to where you came from.' That does not mean, however, that we should cease to challenge the fascist groups through marches and demonstrations and pickets, but that we should destroy fascism at its racist roots and not merely react to it.*

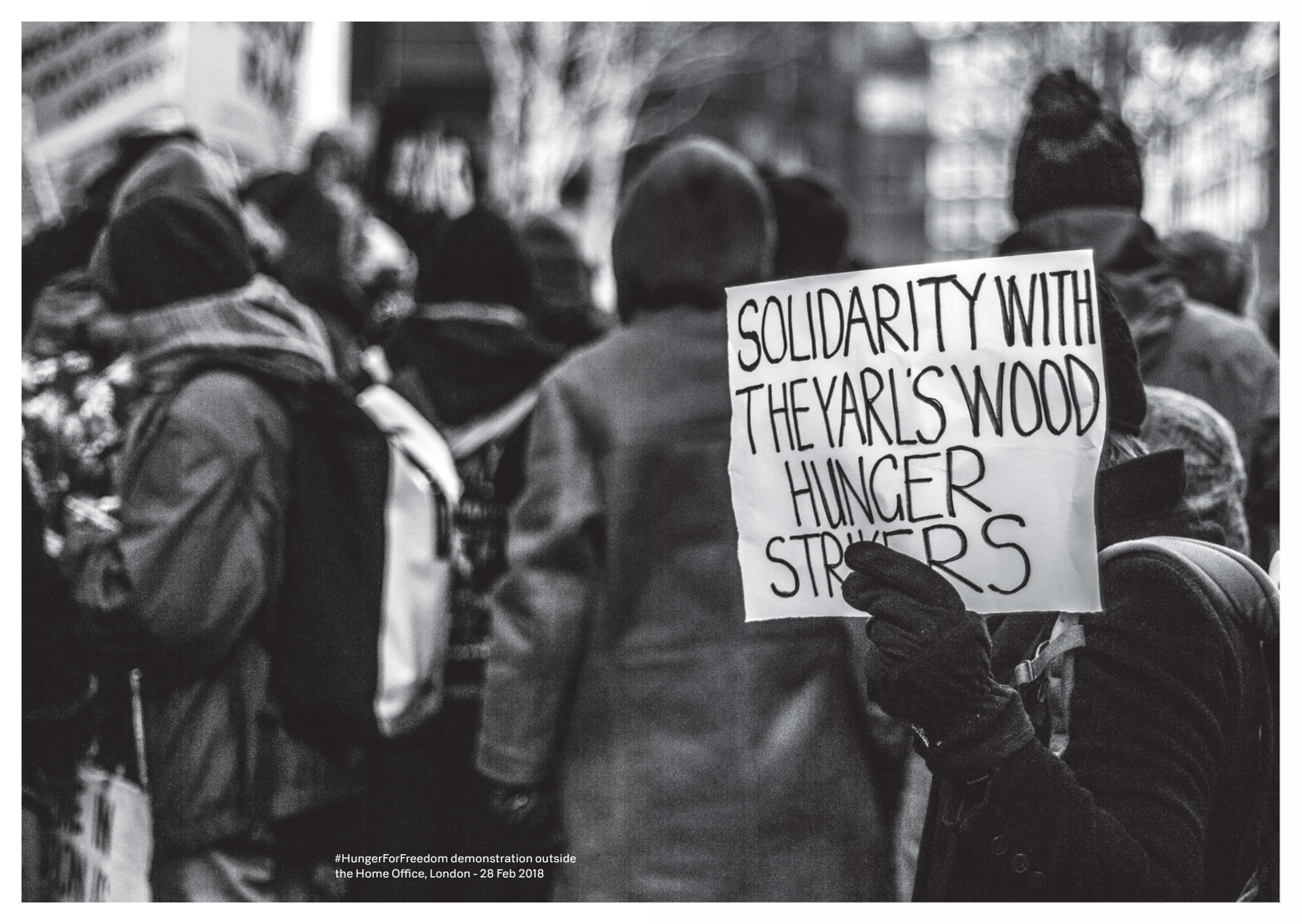
Today we should focus on similar considerations: how to balance opposition to far-right provocations and the racism going on in institutions and neighbourhoods; how to strengthen bonds between anti-racist networks and communities; the role of accountability and understanding the limitations of accountability processes. All these questions require historical documentation of successes and failures, so that social movements can learn from the rich institutional memory of struggles against popular and state racism that is so often obscured from view.

It seems to us that opposition to racism and fascism (1) must be able to perceive both far-right alliances with liberalism as well as nativist currents on the socialist left (2) critical of what CARF called the 'macho flexing' cultures of anti-fascism, and (3) consider positive alliances between extra-parliamentary groups and those parts of the socialist left that are anti-racist and anti-nationalist.

The strength in many successful extra-parliamentary activities is that they are not politically aligned to a party or career-building. These processes are also necessitated by the experiences of those marginalised by a politics of "citizens" and "workers" that fails to respond to the demands of the most vulnerable amongst us, or centre a politics which responds to the concerns raised there. These activities are not drawn from forms of theoretical exceptionalism - that this or that position is the correct one - but the approaches they employ and the critical understandings they carry with them, as well as their ability to form networks with other groups and individuals whose campaigns and underlying aims are not substantially different from their own. These are long-term strategies, but they've been repeatedly demonstrated to offer sustainable forms of organising which are more than capable of racking up multiple, overlapping victories.







SOLIDARITY WITH  
THE YARL'S WOOD  
HUNGER  
STRIKERS

#HungerForFreedom demonstration outside  
the Home Office, London - 28 Feb 2018



"ANTI-FASCISTS NEED TO LOOK AT HOW THE FAR-RIGHT HAS ORGANISED IN THE PAST AND IS CURRENTLY ORGANISING IF THEY ARE TO HALT THE RISE OF A POTENTIALLY RESURGENT FAR-RIGHT."

## Fascism in the UK

Fascism was imported to Britain from Italy, much like the Stone Island jackets popular with football casuals in the UK. But rather than being the genuine article, the way it has manifested in the UK has been more like the cheap knock-offs. The first British fascist organisation was the British Fascisti, founded in 1923 after Mussolini's march on Rome. While fascism itself was imported, it found fertile ground in a country rife with nationalism and imperialism.

The British far-right has experienced highs and lows over the past decade. While the British National Party (BNP) once seemed to be on the brink of breaking into mainstream politics, winning dozens of councillors and attracting nearly a million votes, electoral prospects for the far-right now appear to be in ruins and the prospect of them seizing power is remote.

The emergence of the now largely defunct English Defence League (EDL) opened up the streets to a new wave of far-right street activism, but bloody clashes with anti-fascists and brutal state repression seem to have put that genie back in the bottle for now.

However, the internet has given the far-right ways to organise which mean a return to the streets in numbers, or the possibility of a new political party emerging, is never far away. Anti-fascists need to look at how the far-right has organised in the past and is currently organising if they are to halt the rise of a potentially resurgent far-right.

### Electoral parties

The most successful far-right political party in British history was the BNP when it was led by former National Front (NF) activist Nick Griffin. In the early 1990s the BNP was involved in a violent struggle with anti-fascists. Griffin led the party off the streets and onto housing estates.

In 1993 the BNP, then under the leadership of veteran Nazi John Tyndall, had its first ever electoral success when Derek Beacon was elected to be a councillor for the Millwall ward of Tower Hamlets. But it wasn't until 2002 that the party was to taste electoral success again. Under Griffin's leadership the party pursued a strategy of organising in local communities before standing in council elections. This strategy saw them stand hundreds of council candidates across the country over the following decade, at one point having 55 elected councillors. Their showing in these votes acted as a platform for further electoral battles. In 2009 the party had two MEPs elected after winning 943,598 votes in elections for the European Parliament – the highest ever number of votes won by an openly fascist political party in Britain.

But the BNP imploded after this election. Griffin's appearance on the BBC's popular current affairs panel show Question Time was widely panned and is seen by many as a trigger for the party's collapse. But internally the party had to deal with allegations of financial corruption while discontent among grassroots members led to a number of splits. A leaked 2007 membership list for the party revealed it had around 12,000 members. By 2015 it was estimated to only have 500. An attempt by Griffin to return to the streets and cash in on the murder of Lee Rigby was met by hundreds of anti-fascists who took over the party's rallying point, jumping party members as they attempted to pass through the crowd. Griffin was replaced as leader the next year.

Today the party seems to exist purely to collect the money bequeathed to it in the wills of dying supporters. But its legacy is significant. Nearly a million people have shown they will vote for a fascist political party, thousands of people were members of the BNP at one point in their lives and many of the leading activists in the British far-right were in the party at some point. The BNP under Griffin set a standard for British fascists to follow which many others are keen to emulate, but nobody has come anywhere near achieving that level of success. There are now a handful of far-right political parties which either have direct links to the BNP or are attempting to follow a similar strategy.

The English Democrats have been one beneficiary of the collapse of the BNP. The party was founded in 2002 and is not as far-right as the BNP was. It has claimed it wants to be an English version of the Scottish National Party. The chairman describes it as a "moderate, sensible English nationalist party" and members are expected to disavow racism. But in 2013 the leader of the party revealed one in ten members of the party had been in the BNP. That same year saw Andrew Brons, who had been elected MEP for the BNP and was still sitting in the European Parliament, launch a new political party with a number of other former BNP



activists. This was the British Democratic Party (BDP). Brons had attempted to replace Griffin as BNP leader two years earlier and many of his supporters felt the BNP had been watering down their racist, far-right message. The BDP is still active within the British far-right - Brons speaks at far-right gatherings, but has never stood more than a handful of candidates in any election or won more than 1,000 votes.

The main beneficiary of the collapse of the BNP in electoral terms has been the UK Independence Party (UKIP). While not a fascist party itself, UKIP appeals to many voters who the BNP once attracted. UKIP has probably done more than any party in UK political history to distance itself from the far-right, but it also maintains links to far-right parties in Europe through its group in the European Parliament. In recent years leading figures in the party have been accused of using rhetoric which inflames racial tensions and the party regularly has to expel members for racism. In August 2017, the party was nearly taken over by counter-jihad street activists grouped around Anne Marie Waters who came second in the party leadership contest.

Waters' campaign was organised by former BNP member Jack Buckby. Buckby had been a member of Liberty GB, a party led by counter-jihad activist Paul Weston. Weston had once stood for UKIP in a general election but left to join the British Freedom Party (BFP), a short-lived split from the BNP which formed a pact with the EDL before folding. Weston is a close associate of Waters and it would not be a surprise to see the small number of Liberty GB supporters folding en masse into Waters' new party, 'For Britain'. One of the highest profile supporters of Waters is former BNP activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, also known as Tommy Robinson, who was the founder and leader of the EDL. Waters' 'For Britain' party is likely to see the most growth of a far-right political party over the next year. Waters is a

former Labour activist and trade unionist who has been involved in anti-Muslim street activism for a number of years. While her party will adopt far-right positions on law and order, immigration and Muslims, early signs suggest it will be taking social democratic positions on a number of social and cultural issues. Waters' tendency is civic nationalist rather than white nationalist. White nationalists argue for nationality to be defined in racial terms, in Britain that only white people can be British. Civic nationalists, on the other hand, argue that nationality is defined by citizenship. So Waters' tendency does not *appear* to encourage discrimination against individuals based on their "race" per se, but instead argues for increasing what amounts to structural racism, such as stripping all Islamist terror suspects of their human rights or ending immigration from predominantly Muslim societies. Sometimes the line between white nationalism and civic nationalism can be blurry, particularly in the realm of rhetoric.

The main political party for the white nationalist part of the British far-right is what is left of the NF. Through the 1970s the NF became the leading group on the UK far-right. Led by neo-Nazis, the party engaged in political violence against opponents and minorities as well as standing candidates in elections. In the 70s the party became the fourth largest political party in the UK. The 1978 *World in Action* documentary on the NF titled '*The Nazi Party*' revealed the shocking level of violence the party was involved in. Attacks by NF members were occurring across the country on a weekly basis. In the 1979 general election the party won more votes than it has ever won before or since, 191,719, after standing 303 candidates. But the party did not get a single deposit back and began to decline. The party's failure to keep a deposit is widely attributed to Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives winning back their voters by appearing to adopt their policies. (Under Theresa May the Conservatives seem to have followed a similar course, with it being revealed there are striking similarities between several policies from the BNP's 2005 manifesto and current government policy.) The NF has gone through several splits since its 70s heyday. The most recent taking place a couple of years ago. But it has started to regroup, drawing in some former BNP activists and picking up some people from the collapse of the EDL.

### Street activity

When the BNP led the majority of the UK far-right off the streets in the 90s, the NF didn't follow. Through most of the early noughties the NF were the leading far-right street organisation in the UK. But with the BNP making waves in electoral politics, turnouts for the NF were generally poor and were rarely in triple figures. Hours after an NF march in Bermondsey south London in 2001, an Asian man was attacked by a mob

of ten white men believed to be NF supporters. Racist attacks and violence being linked to the party were common but on a small scale. Several other far-right groups attempted to keep the far-right on the streets but every attempt failed, partly due to pressure from militant anti-fascists. A meeting organised by the Nationalist Alliance, which had absorbed members of the White Nationalist Party, Combat 18, NF and BNP, in West Yorkshire was attacked by militant anti-fascist group Antifa in 2005. This was one of numerous run ins anti-fascists had with far-right groupuscules.

It wasn't until the launch of the EDL in 2009 that the UK far-right reappeared on the streets in numbers. Founded by former BNP members Yaxley-Lennon and his cousin Kevin Carroll, the EDL quickly started holding protests against Islam that attracted thousands of people. The EDL emerged as the BNP was imploding and quickly picked up a number of key party activists. The EDL is part of the counter-jihad tendency of the far-right. While not always explicitly racist, counter-jihad activists claim European culture is under threat from Islam and frequently single out migrants from countries where Islam is the dominant religion. This approach was also used by the BNP, particularly in Northern former industrial towns with large Muslim populations. By taking this strategy into street activity, the EDL acted as an entry point to far-right politics for many. Neo-Nazis recruited from this anti-Muslim tendency by claiming Muslim migration to Europe was a Jewish plot. But many in the counter-jihad movement openly support Israel and this has created a fissure within the UK far-right over whether Israel should be supported. As the EDL grew it started to splinter. Around its peak,

a think tank claimed that the EDL had 25,000-35,000 members, meaning a significant number of people were introduced to far-right street politics. Veteran far-right activists flocked to the EDL where young members started to become exposed to more extreme political ideas. Some groups broke off from the EDL such as the 'Infidels' network because they didn't feel it was far-right enough. The first two Infidels groups to leave were the North West Infidels (NWI) and North East Infidels (NEI), both quickly had members jailed for political violence against the Left. The broader network expanded to include new regional Infidels groups, such as the South West Infidels (SWI) and other EDL splinter groups like the South East Alliance (SEA). This network had no problems working with the neo-Nazi part of the extreme right which was invigorated by the emergence of the EDL. Among the far-right groups to return to the streets post-EDL is the British Movement (BM). Once one of the most violent far-right groups in the UK, BM is now little more than a small club of dedicated neo-Nazis who exchange newsletters and hold an annual "festival" on a campsite with their kids.

At the same time as the EDL was splintering, other far-right groups were increasing their street activity, particularly in the north of England where the NF were able to boost its protests with former EDL activists. Following the state repression of the Antifa UK group in 2009 there was little militant anti-fascist response to this wave of far-right street activity beyond a handful of incidents in major Northern cities. The absence of an effective militant anti-fascist group meant the streets were relatively open for far-right

groups to mobilise and organise without opposition. The north is where a large amount of far-right street activity has happened in recent years, particularly in Rotherham which was at the centre of a child sexual abuse scandal by gangs of British-Asian men. Whenever there is a case of what the far-right describe as "Muslim grooming gangs" operating in an area there is a distinct possibility the area will become a target for far-right activity.

As neo-Nazi street activity was increasing a new neo-Nazi group emerged – National Action (NA). Now banned under the government's anti-terror legislation, NA helped organise the largest openly neo-Nazi protests in the UK for a generation. The group was founded by one individual with a background in UKIP and online neo-Nazism and another who was once in the youth wing of the BNP. NA brought together a number of former BNP youth members and recruited new members from imageboards, the image-based forums (like 4chan and 8chan) which helped to give birth to the "alt-right". NA also borrowed heavily from the aesthetics and strategy of the radical left, along similar lines to the way autonomous nationalists in Germany have copied the "black bloc" aesthetic and now organise horizontally.

NA encountered a group of militant anti-fascists on their first public outing in 2013 and were forced to abandon their plans to join a Golden Dawn solidarity protest. They decided to hold unannounced flash mobs across the UK as they tried to establish themselves as a street-based group. It wasn't until March 2015 that they held a protest which was preannounced. This was the White Man March in Newcastle, organised by Castleford-based neo-Nazi Wayne Bell. Militant anti-fascists from across the UK mobilised to oppose the event and three NA members were hospitalised, including the lead singer of NA's hardcore punk band which disbanded shortly after. The White Man March was attended by a range of neo-Nazi groups, alongside the local NF whose leader was arrested for trying to attack anti-fascists with a heavy duty flagpole.

Other groups present included the Creativity Alliance (CA), a tiny neo-Nazi cult which worships Hitler; the aforementioned BM, on one of their rare public outings; National Rebirth of Poland (NOP), a UK wing of a Polish neo-Nazi group; and Misanthropic Division (MD), an international neo-Nazi network which was set up to send volunteers to fight with the then neo-Nazi Ukrainian paramilitary group Azov Division. Despite taking several arrests and having a number of members hospitalised, NA viewed the event as a success and attempted a repeat in Liverpool the following August. The White Man March in Liverpool was a complete disaster for NA as thousands of anti-fascists occupied Lime Street station in what has been dubbed the "Battle of Lime Street". Around thirty members of NA were forced

to take cover in the lost luggage office before being escorted out of the city under police protection. Nazis unable to make it to lost luggage were attacked on the station concourse and in the surrounding streets, with at least one being knocked unconscious.

August 2015 saw a sharp increase in political violence between the far-right and the far-left. Earlier in the month a group of far-right football hooligans attacked the Clapton Ultras, anti-fascist football supporters of Clapton FC, at a pre-season friendly in Thamesmead. Around 60 Clapton supporters were prevented from entering the ground by a mob of Millwall and Charlton hooligans. Clashes between the two groups saw numerous people hospitalised. This network of football hooligans was brought together through the EDL. In August 2011 they met in Eltham and attempted to head to Lewisham to attack rioters. When Lee Rigby was murdered in Woolwich in 2013 (which led to a brief resurgence of EDL activity) this network was strengthened. Their attack at Thamesmead was motivated by the Clapton Ultras' success at preventing a far-right campaign to shut them down. This campaign was launched by the Pie & Mash Squad, a group of self-styled football hooligans with a Facebook page who had shut down another anti-fascist ultras group near Bristol.

The Pie & Mash campaign was supported by the SEA, the south east EDL splinter group with strong ties to the Infidels network. In December 2014 SEA leader Paul Prodromou was nearly killed by anti-fascists after leading an attack on Clapton Ultras in Southend. Prodromou was kicked out of the EDL in 2012 and made uniting the far-right on the streets his goal. Prodromou's unity project saw little success until the start of the migrant crisis. Under the guise of supporting truckers being fined for migrants hiding in their vehicles, Prodromou worked with the Kent NF to organise a series of protests in Dover against immigration. These were supported by nearly every far-right group involved in street activity in the UK and peaked on 30 January 2016, when five hours of street fighting between anti-fascists and the far-right brought chaos to the coastal town. Around 60 far-right activists were jailed as a result of these clashes and far-right street activity is yet to recover. NA returned to Liverpool the following month alongside Polish football hooligans, NWI and SEA activists. Around 40 of them were arrested and several have been jailed as a result. Combined with the repression after Dover, the Infidels network was broken.

The government's proscription of NA, which has subsequently been applied to two groups they launched after the ban - Scottish Dawn and NS131, has meant their core organisers are now nearly all tied up with legal problems. Neo-Nazi street activity is unlikely to return to 2015 levels for some time though the impetus for that to happen is still there. The far-right have not left





the streets, there have been two new groups organising large protests which have attracted a considerable contingent of far-right activists. These are Yaxley-Lennon's UK Against Hate (UAH), launched after the Manchester Arena bombing and the Football Lads Alliance (FLA). While the FLA is not a far-right group itself (yet), its marches have reminded many observers of the EDL and many of the same faces are back on the streets.

### Online & the "Alt-Right"

Yaxley-Lennon is at the forefront of far-right online publishing in the UK. While he claims not to be part of the far-right, his followers are regularly responsible for acts of far-right violence and on some occasions terrorism. Yaxley-Lennon is now one of the leading correspondents for Canadian alt-right YouTube channel Rebel Media and has a huge following on social media. Rebel Media backed the UAH protest in Manchester, advertising it on the huge UK mailing list the channel has built up. This enabled Yaxley-Lennon to draw thousands onto the streets with less than a week of promotion. Rebel was set up by a Canadian conservative broadcaster, has had dalliances with the "alt-right" and has found an enthusiastic audience in the UK's counter-jihad movement.

The only figure on the UK "alt-right" with a larger online following than Yaxley-Lennon is Paul Joseph Watson, the Battersea-based InfoWars editor who has melded conspiracy theories with anti-establishment conservatism. Watson broadcasts on YouTube where he has over a million subscribers. On Twitter Watson has nearly 750,000 followers and he has replaced Milo Yiannopoulos as the leading "alt-right" figure on the platform. Just as with Yiannopoulos, when Watson includes the account of a political enemy in a tweet, their mentions will fill up with abusive messages. Watson and Yaxley-Lennon are two of the most successful right-wing online publishers in the UK but they are far from the only ones.

The last decade has seen the UK far-right move online at an alarming rate. Prior to the professionalisation of the BNP, far-right digital publishing in the UK was in a tawdry state. A handful of servers, usually based in the US, were responsible for hosting poorly designed websites for the people who kept neo-Nazi thought alive on the web. But the BNP developed a sophisticated web presence and set a new standard for far-right publishing. Then social media arrived and a host of Web 2.0 services with commitments to free speech opened up. The British far-right is now using Facebook, Twitter, Soundcloud, Archive.org and Discord among a wide range of other services. These platforms will occasionally make moves to clamp down on hate speech or far-right organising but generally it goes unhindered.

Another trend which is shaping far-right online activity

is the wave of digital natives entering the far-right, from the teens being recruited to neo-Nazi groups on imageboards through to the young counter-jihad activists who know how to shoot and edit video. One of the drivers for far-right use of the internet has been the ability for anti-fascists to disrupt and hinder far-right organising in real life. Even today, far-right meetings are still disrupted, cancelled and occasionally attacked. Holding regular street stalls is very difficult for far-right groups because anti-fascists move against them, so online activity acts as a surrogate for the far-right's inability to organise in public. Successful far-right figures online are also setting an example many smaller players in far-right politics are seeking to emulate.

Below the major players in the UK "alt-right" (who are often considered "alt-lite" by those to their right) are a host of other activists who are generally more politically extreme than the figures closest to becoming mainstream figures. One example is Colin Robertson who broadcasts as "Millennial Woes". Robertson has ties with Richard Spencer in the US, having addressed the notorious "Heil Trump" rally in Washington. Today Robertson is knocking around with the London Forum, the regular neo-Nazi meetings that are now happening across the UK. Another UK fascist with a growing online presence is former BNP youth leader Mark Collett. According to some, Collett is being groomed to be the leader of a future far-right party by leading neo-Nazis. Collett hosts a weekly "alt-right" news show on YouTube with Tara McCarthy, a British "alt-right" activist based in the US. He also regularly appears on the YouTube show of former KKK leader David Duke.

Many of these figures are linked in some way to the two key UK "alt-right" events: the London Forum and the Traditional Britain Group (TBG). Both hold regular events at upmarket central London venues where neo-Nazis mix with a range of right-wing figures. The London Forum is organised by Jeremy Bedford-Turner and is a split from the New Right series of meetings which were organised in London by Troy Southgate, a veteran British fascist who is now the key figure behind the national anarchist tendency, which combines neo-Nazism and anarchism. Southgate has denounced Bedford-Turner as a possible state asset but the London Forum has become far more popular than the New Right meetings ever were. The TBG is similar to London Forum but has closer links to the Conservative right. Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg addressed a TBG dinner in 2013 and attendees include people with connections to leading members of the government. TBG is led by Gregory Lauder-Frost who also heads up the UK wing of Arktos Media, the major "alt-right" publisher run by Swedish industrialist Daniel Friberg. A recent academic analysis of "alt-right" social media accounts revealed that Arktos is at the centre of the UK and European "alt-right".



### Brexit

Withdrawing Britain from the European Union (EU) has long been a goal of the UK far-right. When campaigning began for the EU referendum a large number of far-right activists threw their energy into the Leave campaign. For example, one Leave stall in Leeds was regularly manned by Wayne Bell from NA and Mark Collett. One of the organisers of the Thamesmead attack on the Clapton Ultras distributed Leave literature at Millwall games and was photographed alongside the then UKIP leader Nigel Farage. As a result of the referendum, overt far-right activity decreased and when the result was revealed the far-right was jubilant. Ensuring Article 50 was activated became a key issue for the far-right.

The SEA held a poorly attended protest in central London a month after the referendum demanding the immediate activation of Article 50, but this came at a time when the far-right was still reeling from the mass arrests in Dover and Liverpool. The SEA has not held a public march in the capital since. Some far-right activists targeted protests organised by Remain supporters. Polish neo-Nazi David Czerwonko was filmed snatching a beret from the head of comedian Eddie Izzard. Czerwonko was later involved in attack on a squat in Belgravia by the Pie & Mash Squad and was subsequently banned from the UK. On another occasion a far-right activist linked to the SEA attacked an anti-Brexit protest outside the Supreme Court. But in general the organised far-right has not been able to capitalise on Brexit, despite their gloating.

When Britain does eventually leave the EU it is likely to lead to a surge of far-right activity. A large proportion of voters who backed Brexit did so because of immigration. There is a feeling among many far-right supporters that non-white immigration is "changing Britain's culture" and "attacking their way of life". Yet Brexit is likely to see internal EU migration (where the majority of those migrating are considered white) decrease and non-EU migration increase to plug the labour short-

ages which Brexit will create. Instead of Poles coming to the UK to do fruit-picking work, employers will look outside the EU for cheap labour. If there is an increase in non-EU migration to the UK after Brexit many of the racist Leave voters will feel betrayed.

### Hate crime & terrorism

The immediate aftermath of the EU referendum saw a spike in hate crime. The far-right have long been responsible for a large chunk of racist attacks in the UK, but there have been few proven links between the individuals currently carrying out racist attacks and the organised far-right. Individuals with links to the BNP, EDL and other far-right groups are regularly jailed for racist violence, yet more often than not the perpetrators of far-right violence are inspired by these groups and a pliant media, rather than being active on the far-right. When individuals join far-right groups they start to experience scrutiny from the state, anti-fascists and the press. While far-right individuals have the motivation to commit hate crimes and encourage others, many are unwilling to risk the punishment they would receive if caught.

That said, far-right violence is still an issue in the UK. Attacks on minorities or violence targeting the Left by organised far-right groups have increased significantly since the EDL took to the streets. But the level of far-right violence is well below historical highs reached at various points before the millennium. The attack on a Sikh dentist by a supporter of NA, the murder of Jo Cox MP and the Finsbury Park Mosque attack show that as long as there are social antagonisms over race and religion, there is a risk individuals will take matters into their own hands. There are several other cases where neo-Nazis and far-right individuals have been prevented from carrying out planned attacks, such as the NA supporter who was arrested for snapchatting pictures of pipe bombs he had made. Neo-Nazis are still training and preparing themselves for a "race war" which they think is coming. But they're not yet the threat they'd like to be - the British state will continue to be more of a threat to migrant communities than Nazis.

"RESISTANCE TO THE MOST OVERTLY PUNISHING STATE VIOLENCE CAN'T JUST BE SEEN IN TERMS OF THE PRISON; PEOPLE ARE QUIETLY REMOVED AND DETAINED BY THE STATE'S FUNCTIONARIES, WITH LITTLE OUTRAGE, THROUGH THE LAW AND ORDER OF THE INSTITUTION OF PSYCHIATRY"

## The Abolition of Carceral Forms

Functional to the way a capitalist state operates, prisons are created and naturalised as commonsensical; framed as a means to guard the public from chaos, disorder and 'anarchy'. The state (re)defines categories of people and their value politically, economically and socially with respect to markets. Prisons are an expression of this conceit. They not only manage populations surplus to the needs of capital but are extensions of the Euro-American settler colonial and dispossession projects which continue to 'manage' already marginalised people.

There are excellent resources and campaigns on prison abolition, particularly in the United States, from podcasters, to community street activists, marching agitators and a host of local organising campaigns. Many of these campaigns and resources build on an anti-carceral politic - a politic which rejects the carceral state and a liberal consensus that drives and coerces society's understandings of the 'productive' subject under capitalism, and consolidates and maintains historical processes of racialisation, whiteness, class and gendered injustice inherent in state institutions.

The drive towards anti-carceral struggle in prison abolition has been borne out of the state's devastating hold on people at the sharp end of this struggle - a universal experience which is unevenly suffered. With changes in the global capitalist economy, industrial and productive innovation over the last several decades, and a forced dispersal of working class resistance struggles in the UK and United States - together with changes to policing and the nature of the surveillance state - mass incarceration continues to grow through an expanding and highly profitable prison-industrial complex. An anti-carceral politic, anti-racist or feminist politic is not a choice, it's an imperative.

Despite parallels frequently being drawn with immigration detention, abolition is typically framed and resisted explicitly with reference to prisons. Of course there are many reasons for this, among them, the 'mass' in mass incarceration (of which the numbers are staggering, again particularly in the U.S), but also because the prison system most obviously demonstrates (for those who care to interrogate it) an injustice. However, resistance to the most overtly punishing (and disciplining) state violence can't just be seen in terms of the prison. People are quietly removed and detained by functionaries of the state, with little outrage, through the law and order of the institution of psychiatry. We don't tend to discuss this on its own terms as much as we should - prisons, although sometimes very visibly connected to the institutional framework of mental health through many cases of deaths in custody and interaction with police, are not the only means of targeting certain groups of people and they are not the only spaces where people are traumatised or lose their sense of self and basic freedoms.

Although the institution of psychiatry may not incarcerate en masse to the same degree as the prison system, it is important to note that carceral logics are reproduced within mental health services and psychiatry. As with prisons and immigration detention centres, there remains a disproportionate response to the targeting of certain marginalised people with specific kinds of mental health experience (or at least who are quick to be labelled as having these kinds of mental health conditions) who endure the worst effects of mental health institutionality - psychosis and psychotic disorders in particular. People diagnosed with these disorders are more susceptible to what I will refer to in this text as *Forced Inpatient Hospitalisation and Treatment* (FIHT).

The terminology of FIHT used here covers sectioning, but sectioning can often limit our assumptions about involuntary hospitalisation and treatment, which we need to broaden and remove from strictly legalistic and psychiatric associations. FIHT also covers involuntary, forced or coerced treatment, ranging from forced medication to Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) and use of restraint. FIHT can affect people regardless of whether one has a diagnosis, a long-term history of poor and fluctuating mental health, or more recent manifestations and new experiences - for many reasons not everyone has the capacity to access mental health services, but they may still find themselves subject to FIHT should someone deem their behaviour warrants it.

The processes surrounding FIHT employ multiple institutional forces that prison abolitionists seek to dismantle. People undergoing and discharged from FIHT share many difficult experiences with those released from prison: discrimination, difficulties accessing



housing and benefits from local authorities, to name a few. There are enforced expectations of a return to work, to 'integrate' into local communities, society and family life, together with fighting the routine and highly discursive narratives promulgated about what psychosis is and who people with schizophrenic conditions, in particular, are. A routine set of signifiers and biases have formed around conditions such as schizophrenia; it is a product of an insular psychiatric framework, itself a symptom of broader relationships which are dispersed through popular culture and media, which isolate and discipline. Schizophrenia and many other experiences of psychosis are relegated to the medical ('Psychiatric'), but also to the 'private' and 'internal' at the level of the individual. The effect of confining socio-political and economic struggles (for these are struggles of welfare and survival) to the level of the 'personal' is two-fold: the positioning cements the role of healthcare institutionalism to deal with people often in crisis situations (a division and hierarchy of knowledge), while simultaneously depoliticising and mystifying the reality of FIHT and its impact on those whose experiences and identities will lend themselves more readily to state violence. This essentialising approach could also help explain the neglect of FIHT from discussions and work around abolition, along with the capacity of psychiatry and the realm of 'mental health' to hide behind the language of treatment and support.

Mental health provision has seen dramatic shifts in perception and treatment over time and to varying degrees, despite the underlying dynamics remaining the same with respect to its relationality and perception. Notwithstanding the criticisms levelled at Michel Foucault, his historiography of incarceration and how we have developed our understandings of the 'sick' has been a useful launching point. But it has not suitably predicted the current relationship of mental

health and the 'abnormal' to the current socio-economic and political forces that penetrate our lives: workfare, the disciplining of the working class, migrant labour and access to state-provided support services, or the headline moralising which, ironically of course, remains disconnected from any large scale substantive action on supporting people with mental illness and particularly psychotic disorders. Rather, many people with these kinds of mental health experiences still tend to be treated as curiosities at best, or vilified as criminal 'psychopaths' at worse.

Mental health slurs are for another time, but it is important to recognise how words like 'stupid' 'schizo' 'insane' 'dumb' 'psycho' etc, help to reinforce already pejorative and negative conceptions which lend themselves to ableism and propping up a systematic network of harm - these terms have a history and this history has brought with it into the present a whole accumulation of terrible classifications and treatments, again, especially for people experiencing schizophrenia who are already often classed, racialised and gendered in certain ways.

Up until relatively recently, people experiencing schizophrenia and other psychotic conditions have been fair game for experimentation and the most vile forced treatments in an effort to establish a body of philosophical and empirical works in the name of science. As the figure of the enlightened, rational, leisurely, philanthropic (white) man of the 18th and 19th centuries consolidated into (and co-produced) mass industrial production processes constituting capitalist social relations, the language of discipline and control became more pervasive. This later gave way to socially progressive and morally principled individualised care and treatment 'packages' later in the 20th century with both legislative and non-legislative tendencies, which this text pulls under the label of FIHT, framed as sup-



port for vulnerable people on the basis that they were in fact still human but simply 'sick'. That said, the confinement and seclusion of the 1700s and the idea that the mentally deranged were without the reason accorded to the white bourgeois man, continued to pervade these newer frameworks of morality and the structural and social practices of the late 20th century.

The more unhelpful diagnostic and social perceptions surrounding psychotic disorders remained in place and mental health institutions became a version of everything that came before with a different gloss - FIHT wasn't simply a powerful tool for treating and protecting the self and managing ways of being and experiencing the world (a risk to harm or not), it was about protecting others from those who overstepped the bounds of 'normal' and 'acceptable' composure and conduct - a 'civilising' mission with forced treatment still being everyday practice in inpatient wards across the UK and elsewhere.

Understanding the sustained conceptualisation of psychotic experiences in society over time, and how these are woven into the very fabric of institutional medical and psychiatric frames, is important for establishing insight into why discussing psychiatric FIHT in abolition movements more broadly is a bit lacklustre. And despite being perhaps perceived as 'small fry' in comparison to mass incarceration, it remains important to think about how structural violences and the language of care and treatment operate throughout medicalised psychiatric spaces in the first place. Who is more likely to face FIHT and why? How are people affected by gatekeeping to services they might want or need in different ways? Who will be more likely to be medicated? And what set of assumptions will people make when disclosing less common mental health experiences? As well as asking: how will we perceive ourselves should we accept the logics of these dynamics?



A distinctive feature of FIHT is its justification through the language of treatment and it is important not to throw out necessary and vital support services that people choose to engage with and use. We can't deny the violence inherent in any detention (having things done to you against your will in the name of treatment at the hands of the state is a terrible experience with often lasting trauma), but understanding the history of how people with certain experiences have been treated, is important for contextualising just how dangerous such justifications can be and how there is very little oversight when things go from bad to worse. Acknowledging this and folding FIHT into our work on abolition whilst also having ways to think about alternative networks of care - that don't simply rely on the labour of our interpersonal relationships, the family, the already struggling, to support people in crisis - is very necessary. We need a community to start building and educating itself as to what people with different mental health conditions might require in terms of support and care. Of course in the meantime, under current conditions which make this very difficult, access to decent support through NHS services is still vital for many people, and that requires a well-funded set of access point services that have properly trained people delivering support without any quick judgement to engage FIHT.

One potential problem now with providing support for people who need it is the worry of caring and well-intentioned people filling in the gaps of much needed but cut or readily devalued state and outsourced services (remembering that such services are not a panacea, but until we have sustainable and locally scalable organising networks which deal in direct action attached to everyday life to combat structural violence, this is all a lot of us have). People often see a clash between immediate material needs, and longer term organising, though these do not need to be mutually exclusive things. Rather they work together and reinforce one another, but without a supportive organising framework behind people who can care for others, often unpaid, we cannot ignore the relationship this carves out.

A huge area for discussion in left circles which has more explicitly been brought to the fore with respect to instances of sexual assault and violence, includes forming networks that are accountable to those harmed and for people who might have caused harm. Mental health is no different. This will involve an active willingness of people to commit to engaging in this work, educating ourselves and our networks and being prepared to take responsibility. It might be painful, difficult and upsetting, but it is necessary in everyday life and, perhaps more obscurely, with avoiding the lasting traumas of FIHT.

"THE COLLECTIVE APPROACH TO THIS PLANNING ALLOWED US TO EXPRESS CONCERNS ABOUT OUR SAFETY AND WORK ON OUR ACCOUNTABILITY TO EACH OTHER FOR THE HARM WE MIGHT CAUSE ONE ANOTHER; IT WAS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH."

## Fuck the SWP: Care & Affinity in Confrontation

***This is a short retelling of how a small group of people decided to collectivise our resistance to the presence of the SWP in organising spaces and at events - an activity largely inspired by the desire to stop reproducing our unsustainable, harmful & individualised attempts at such challenges.***

It seems necessary with any writing on the SWP to foreground objections to their continuing existence with broader demands for accountability and harm reduction in social movements. The SWP is a violent formation, but it is neither exceptional or isolated - its kinds of behaviour are present in many other groups and practices. Many of us are already engaged in various accountability work in our organising, and

wanted to better apply that approach to challenging the SWP too.

We decided to organise collectively following our experiences at the Shut Down LD50 demonstration in Hackney. The demonstration was called by a local collective, and many of us had turned up unprepared for a large and unmistakable SWP presence - under their rejuvenated Unite Against Fascism front. Several of us, independently, challenged SWP members there with their placard bundles and literature and were, variously, physically assaulted, loudly accused of being racists, and told we were splitting the left - a claim that came from onlookers too who weren't necessarily SWP members. Our challenges were clearly completely unsustainable and easily brushed off by the SWP.

One of us described an early attempt at taking this more collective approach: "My first experience of collective action against the SWP was spontaneous. They came around fly-posting while we were on a street stall. Afterwards, we went together and swept the area, "improving" the SWP posters with a marker pen. The difference between exhausting and dispiriting confrontation, and a joyous vandalism session with a comrade could hardly be more pronounced."

Our first real attempt to challenge the SWP collectively came when the EDL planned a march on Whitehall. From experience, we knew that the SWP would use the counter demonstration as a chance to recruit and control the event through another prominent front, Unite Against Fascism. We prepared some leaflets to hand out - warning people of the nature and dangers of





the SWP - made a banner to carry, and agreed to meet up before the event to discuss how each of us felt about different levels of confrontation on the day (our presence alone often being enough to engage verbal and physical intimidation) and how we would be accountable to each other while maintaining some basic boundaries of safety. Unfortunately, within 10 minutes of this attempt, two of our number were arrested (perhaps on the advice of someone defending UAF who was seen speaking with police beforehand). This wasn't supposed to happen of course but, wonderfully, the remaining group of people offered arrestee support for those arrested, and some time later the charges were finally dropped. It was clear that we still had to think more carefully about this project.

Over the following months, our group met repeatedly - to share food and ideas, to build trust and understanding. Some of us also began organising together more on our existing political projects. We noticed that a collective attempt to challenge the harm caused by the SWP tended to lead us to seek out fewer immediate physical confrontations, which we'd found increasingly harmful. The collective approach to this planning allowed us to express concerns about our safety and work on our accountability to each other for the harm we might cause one another; it was also instrumental in building a more sustainable approach. As sexual violence, especially in our own political spaces, makes many of us intensely angry, within these intimate structures, the self destructive anger which many of us experienced in these situations was made more productive by our togetherness.

We increasingly attempt to undermine the SWP through their ability to organise - much of which is based on finding places where they recruit members and gather data from people unaware of their history. In the last year, our small group has undertaken a number of actions together. One of the first was to produce some visual tools (stickers, posters, leaflets and flyers) to spread information about the group. Much of these are based on the look of SWP graphics themselves - including their most prominent fronts (the ones you always see in photographs of placards at demonstrations, though hopefully not for much longer). We've been on a number of leafleting sessions together. We've met up to sticker venues before an SWP controlled event takes place, or in an area we've noticed them attempting to recruit in.

One particularly successful action involved leafleting people at Brixton station during one of the SWP regular Friday evening stalls. We spent a few minutes before sketching out our boundaries and what we expected to achieve, then spent roughly 90 minutes standing a reasonable distance from the stall with posters and handed out leaflets with details of the

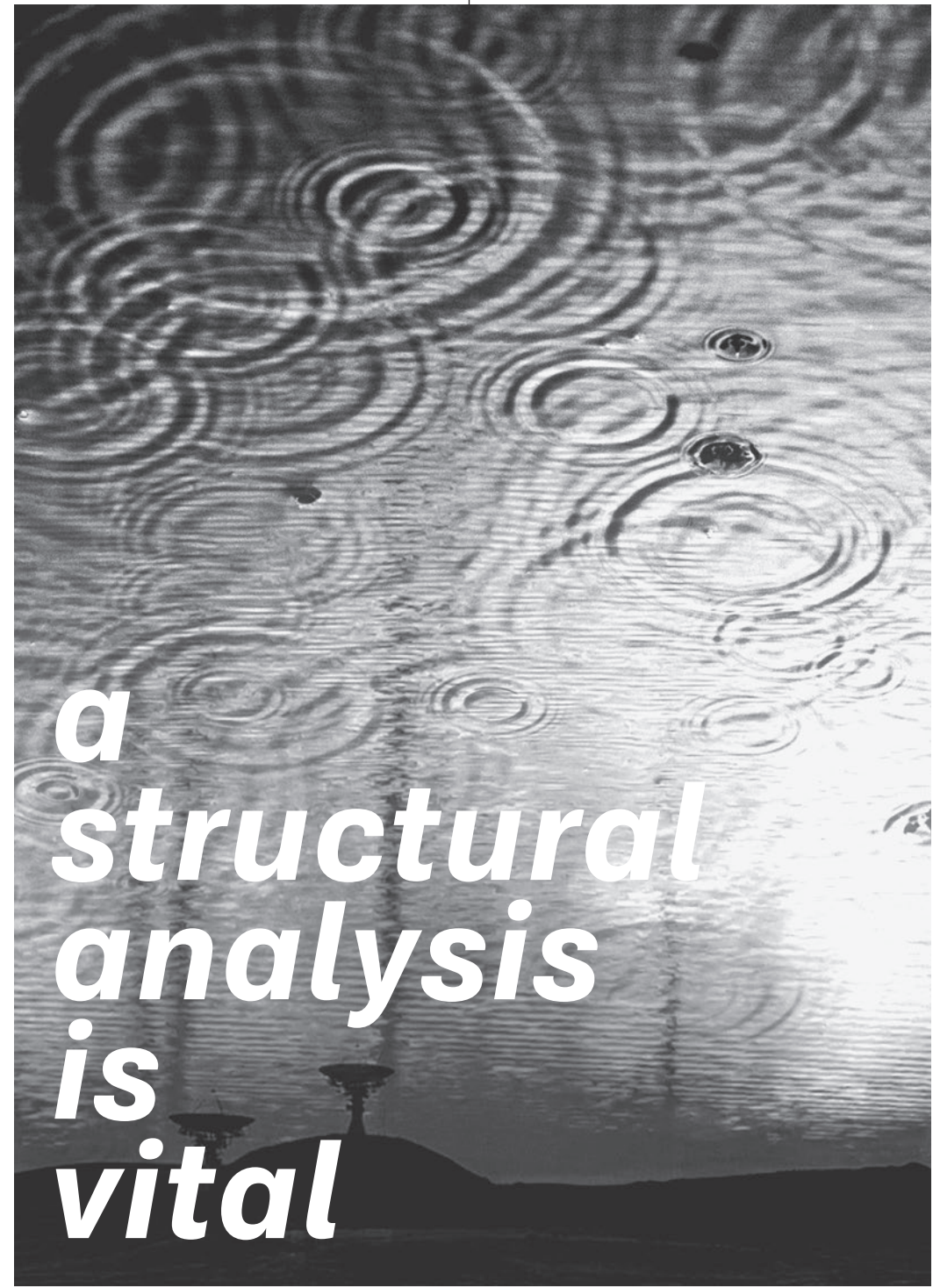


SWP's history and links to research more online. We completely ignored all attempts by the increasingly angry SWP members at the stall to engage us with their attempts to smear and antagonise us. Eventually we retired to a nearby coffee shop to discuss how we felt things had gone, and what had been upsetting for us (being repeatedly misgendered and verbally abused for over an hour is not a pleasant experience, and it was important to be able to talk about the difficulties we'd experienced). It was really pleasing to finally be able to challenge the SWP without feeling that it was followed by days or weeks to recover from the experience.

So, we look back at a year where we feel we challenged a group whose very existence is harmful to others, in a more sustainable way. It's been really lovely to build a collective dynamic of relative safety from which to challenge this group, and it's made our other forms of accountability work more well-sustained and informed too. We hope that others might begin to further replicate this work - which we have found increasingly frustrating for SWP members to counter. We've also been touched and encouraged to see the visual propaganda we made used far more widely than our immediate circles, where it has popped up in places such as Yarl's Wood abolition demos, on university campuses around the country and at the Labour Party Conference. We hope to continue to challenge violence and harm wherever we see it, we hope others will continue to do the same.

*by an affinity group that hates the SWP*

***The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) rape scandal emerged several years ago and resulted in hundreds of members resigning from the SWP (including 90% of its student members) over the handling of rape and sexual harassment by the former SWP National Secretary Martin Smith dating back to 2010, as well as the party attempting to cover up several other instances of rape within their ranks.***



"WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SPEAK ABOUT THESE THINGS IN A STRUCTURAL WAY, WHERE WE CAN BEGIN TO THINK ABOUT WAYS TO MEANINGFULLY CHALLENGE STRUCTURES OF ABUSE IN A WAY THAT BENEFITS THE MOST VULNERABLE SURVIVORS."

## Harm, Abuse and Accountability: A Discussion

*It seems to us that many discussions on harm and accountability fail to adequately express the terms of the discussion. Seeing as you've already begun discussing some widely used terms around this subject as we were sitting down, could we perhaps elaborate on those as a grounding to the discussion?*

**A** We'd just begun talking about the use of 'gas-lighting' in an abuse setting where a person's version of events are constantly undermined, or they're told they're misrepresenting the situation. Nowadays gaslighting is used for all kinds of things - some of which I think are less helpful. Different types of abuse arise out of specific power relations, which enable a person or group to perpetrate that violence against you.

**A** With racism you might also have your experiences of harm undermined, but it can be perpetrated by groups of people or entire dominant structures. Do we want to expand the language of abuse to encompass structural racism? Or perhaps that will undermine the specifics of what we are describing, which is different to structural racism, even if it can be perpetuated by dominant structures as well as interpersonally.

**B** You said you didn't know if it was correct to apply the term gaslighting if it occurred in a group. Maybe that's just as valid, if not more so. If one's faced with that from a whole group, you're going to be left even less sure of what really happened. But yes, it may need a different term which differentiates between the intimate and broader social interaction.

**C** I find I'm made to doubt myself. "Am I making it about race? Am I playing the race card? Is it just in my head? Am I overthinking things?" But I think it's important to recognise gaslighting is a deliberate act - and I actually don't think group situations are necessarily attempting to make you doubt yourself. They can honestly believe it when they refuse to acknowledge a racial dimension. For example, I was telling a white friend about stop and search a few years back, explaining how my brother and his friends get stopped all the time.

"I've never experienced that; that's never happened to me" was his only response. He didn't do it to deliberately undermine the claim. In his head, he really thought it wasn't that much of a problem. But that's an important difference to someone who maybe is well aware that it's an issue and is trying to make you doubt the basis of your claim. I think recognising the meaning of abuse is key as well. Intent is important - whilst harm is always something that needs addressing, you might not mean to harm someone; whereas with abuse, I think it's something very deliberate to cause harm.

**A** We can also consider the term "survivor". Feminist discourse against violence will often use "survivor" instead of "victim" and this has filtered into popular discourse. I have issues with the uncritical way in which we often talk about "centring" survivors which evades a more structural analysis of why this is necessary and what it entails.

There was a recent situation with a political group, kick-started by a prominent member of that group on the radio show of a public figure with a long track record of misogyny and abuse. The denial of responsibility for deciding to appear on this radio show spurred individuals to make public disclosures about their attempts to go to that group and tell them they have promoted work by people who have abused them. Should there not have already been some sort of process in place so that didn't happen? As these negotiations had been happening privately, the group was able to publicly say, "we always take these things really seriously and we would never do things to undermine survivors," even though their behaviour was far from this. Then, rather than dealing with the harm caused by this specific series of harmful actions and decisions, almost everyone involved in the group began to come forward with their own survivorship, as if to offset the harm they had created. And I think it's the problem that we've set up when we "centre" survivors without also analysing power; specifically who already has power and how it is used to silence others that don't.

**C** But that's not how it works. They're not a survivor of those abusive people, or that specific situation. Just because you are a survivor of instances of abuse - which is awful and obviously deserving of solidarity in its own regard, that doesn't mean you can bring it to a situation and demand your concerns be listened to because you're "a survivor". That's not how it works, and that's not what "centring survivors" is meant to mean at all!

**A** I think we need to continue working to meaningfully grapple with how experiences of traumatic violence impact on people in so many ways, but experiencing harm does not necessarily create a structural understanding of how harm is perpetuated on a larger scale and how we might be complicit in causing harm to others.

But with this group, this decision to weaponise their legitimate status as survivors was used to under-

mine a structural critique by implying "you can't challenge us because we have survived abuse, or sexual harassment". This isn't a structural analysis that will help improve conditions for other survivors, especially those that were harmed by this group's actions.

**B** But it's not to say that somebody in that position couldn't have a good critique and understanding of all of this. It's just not automatic.

**C** It's like when people try and excuse bigotry by saying "but my [marginalised group] friend told me that that was okay to say." And you're like, "well, there are qualifiers."

**A** A structural analysis is vital. There are examples of survivors of abuse who have gone on to perpetuate violent, carceral responses to abuse which do little to support survivors who are vulnerable to this abuse, as well as the violence of the state. We can see this in discourse of so-called 'honour-based violence', such as forced marriage and FGM, where the state weaponises disclosures of harm to perpetuate a racist narrative about regressive cultural practices in BAME, and specifically Muslim, communities. As a result, the state is empowered to increase surveillance and criminalisation of these communities. There are individuals who have made careers out of perpetuating this state surveillance and criminalisation of their own communities, including survivors. Disclosures of violence can have far-reaching political consequences and we need to continually situate our response to interpersonal violence within a wider political understanding of state violence, to develop truly liberatory ways to challenge these structures.

Black, brown and migrant feminists have had this dilemma for generations when we're talking about violence in our communities. We know that perpetrators often face racist violence from the state, so we have to create spaces which respond to violence without increasing the state's power. We need to hold those that perpetuate patriarchal abuse to account, but we also need to respond to the violence they face elsewhere. It just gives us yet another thing to have to factor into how we deal with violence and how we're trying to enact accountability in the ways that we organise and live.

**base** *So if it's difficult to think about a structural analysis - and, as you say, impossible for one person to speak for entire groups of marginalised people - how do we approach accountability then, not just for sexual violence but with racism, transmisogyny and more?*

**A** There is an unhelpful current trend of fetishising the traumatised subject; constantly demanding that people disclose their most intimate personal stories as a mode of authenticity when discussing abuse. We shouldn't require that individuals disclose experiences

of violence for them to have an analysis of abuse and harm, especially when there is already an imbalance in who has the freedom to publicly disclose their abuse and have it believed, as a result of migration status, race, class, gender identity etc.

**C** Someone might describe an experience. They're the person who knows best what that was like, but that doesn't then mean they're able to analyse it, to apply what that should mean when it comes to how we deal with perpetrators. If that was the case, then we wouldn't see the need for therapy, or other forms of group care. Why do people need other people to support them to actually work these things out? I think possibly the move to looking solely at lived experiences was in reaction to those very experiences being completely ignored. But now I think, yes, there is that danger of giving that too much value at the expense of...

**A** And also specifically when we're talking about abuse, individuals might not want to talk publicly about their abuse. And why should they have to?

**C** If you're not willing to disclose you're a survivor, or you aren't a survivor, then you're expected not to

talk about it as much. As if you're not willing to come forward and say #metoo [a hashtag on social media which represented a mass disclosure from individuals detailing abuse they'd experienced] for example - you shouldn't really have a voice in this conversation. And I think that's a dangerous conception of what it means to centre survivors.

**A** This is in no way to undermine the strength it takes to make these disclosures publicly. But we should be able to speak about these things

in a structural way, where we can begin to think about ways to meaningfully challenge structures of abuse in a way that benefits the most vulnerable survivors.

On the left specifically, I think there is a lot of talk about challenging abuse with little meaningful commitment from those that are not already harmed, or at risk of harm. Why is it up to us that are already abused, and at risk, to continually challenge those who perpetuate harm?

**C** Yeah, I'm tired of that rhetoric as a way of making it other people's problem, like a deferral of responsibility. So then it isn't their own responsibility to change themselves. It isn't their own responsibility to take ownership of what they've done or how they've abused people. I think it is a structural problem - but that doesn't stop it being an interpersonal one as well.

**A** Following a recent disclosure about yet another person in leftist circles being outed as an abuser, a friend said to me that this just proves now that, more than anything, those of us who have been doing this work for a long time need to continue to build networks and support each other. This isn't about ap-

***"Why is it up to us that are already abused, and at risk, to continually challenge those who perpetuate harm?"***



pealing to those that abuse to stop abusing us, but to continue protecting our networks to defend ourselves.

We can say until we're blue in the face that our spaces need to take sexual violence and abuse seriously, and that this includes holding your own friends to account. Yet how much has this worked so far? Maybe the best thing the rest of us can do is support each other and create our own spaces. But if we step back, that doesn't stop other people being at risk. This is always where we find ourselves trapped: stay and face the constant threat of violence, or protect yourself from it through necessity - knowing that others will incur the violence instead.

A Something I've spoken about a lot with like-minded friends recently is formalising the systems that we already have in place to warn and protect each other; specifically women and non binary people and in a way similar to the woman in the US who had created an open web spreadsheet of abusive men in media. Obviously it's not a particularly accurate method because it could just be people who have some other issue with an individual putting their details in. But there are ways of creating this protection amongst ourselves and not simply battling with others to take it seriously. I know people talk about doing it through a formalised left structure like a union, but then we know there are unions that literally protect abusers within their own ranks!

C How do we do that? We're talking a lot about challenging our friends. Who are your friends and then who are the people who get left out of that? What about those people who need warning but are not in those friendship circles? And how are they reached and how are they informed? I definitely agree about the whole idea of not making it another big organisational thing.

A Many people I know who do the work of building structures of accountability are constantly reflecting on the harm that they themselves might be complicit in causing and how to challenge that. Admitting that constant self-critique is not a weakness, but necessary. In processes of accountability, it is also important for those that are involved in holding others accountable to think about ways that they have harmed others. A recognition that no one individual, or group, is immune from creating harm has to be central to the new models of transformative justice that we want to create. As we've said, all of us are capable of causing harm.

B I've just had an experience of where that actually did happen - somebody did put their hand up and admit to causing harm. They got heavily criticised and were sanctioned for what they were admitting to. And I think it's something that needs very careful managing,

but it's too important to ignore.

A How did that situation play out?

B I think in the end everybody came to an understanding and they're certainly all working together and things are beginning to mend, but it was quite hurtful in lots of ways.

A And is that person ever likely to make such a disclosure again?

B I think that's a problem. Their opinion of these processes has been damaged itself. And that's really sad.

A It's a real challenge in these situations not to simply replicate a statist model for justice, as that is so pervasive. So, resisting the urge to immediately opt for banishment or punishment, instead actually looking at how we can seek justice as well as growth and transformation. Any attempt to enact transformative justice is difficult because it necessitates not simply abandoning the person who caused the harm and potentially grave abuse, especially when you go through a process of second guessing whether their desire to transform is genuine or not.

C And what is the measure of when somebody is

beyond help? Often, actually, the people we speak about in these spaces have done things on a serial basis.

B I mean, that's the key isn't it? The first time around, hopefully, an abusive person has been transformed. The only way to tell is by watching it. As time progresses, if it is serial, then it needs some other kind of remedy. I do believe that one has to give people a chance - but not if that is itself being taken advantage of by an abuser.

A And also who are the people who get second chances or that potential for transformation? That's decided on the grounds of race, class and access to certain spaces. So we can believe in an individual's capacity for change, but structurally there are social groups with historical impunity for committing crimes against others. I also don't know if either of you has ever been involved in a successful accountability process? It's often impossible.

*base It would be interesting to navigate a bit between at what point this imperfection becomes complicity - you are saying perfection is a very dangerous thing to start trying to seek with each other - playing out in both expectations of the "perfect victim" but also in conceptions of the "perfect abuser". How might we accept that these processes are imperfect - but that isn't about excusing harm? How do we recognise it's the failure to attempt accountability that causes more anger than whether we're successful in making an abuser accountable?*

A I often have to contend with other people's understanding of violence, which can be different from my own. I know that it might be easier for me to recog-

nise because my own life, work and how my organising has shaped my politics. Simultaneously I don't feel equipped to have to explain abuse, power and violence constantly. But what do people even understand to be abuse? What is people's understanding of violence? What counts as complicity? Different people read violence completely differently.

C It's really hard to articulate all that - it's something that you recognise but you wouldn't necessarily be able to articulate.

A I think it's also okay that we don't have any perfect models for justice yet. If prison abolition movements have taught us anything, it's that sometimes you don't have a full idea what the end result will resemble and that it will likely not exist in our lifetime. I think all of us here believe in prison abolition [vigorous nods!] But we are nowhere near perfecting how structures of transformative justice look - especially as we continue to live under patriarchal white supremacist capitalism. But we can keep working at it.

C There seems to be a difference between disclosure in these public spaces and more personal spaces. In fact scale comes up a lot - the abolition of prisons is a really big task, society-wide, what does that look like across various scales? And that's what some of these things going on with the #metoo hashtag - they're really being done in a very public way. But then we're also talking about us, our friendship circles, working groups that we're in. And these levels are interconnected involving written and unwritten rules or standards of behaviour and so on.

A In one group that I organise as part of, we only put in place a full process for accountability once an incident had taken place where one member was harmed. That's another problem - we only tend to talk about these things after harm has been caused because we are often trying to do so much at once. And when that happens it fails not only the survivor of the violence, but also others who look to the group as working to enact transformative politics on a small scale. Yet on the left we see people whose literal close friends and "allies" have abused others and this is no one's responsibility. If people don't even understand accountability in their own circles, in so-called radical spaces, how can we possibly have truly transformative politics on a bigger scale?

B Is that because it's their friends and they have too much of an emotional response towards them?

A It is definitely easier to chastise others from a distance.

C I think that's the thing. It complicates relationships. There can be a failure to decide to actually deal with it - and people choose either silence or simply

distance - and there can be something very easy about just cutting someone off. I'm definitely guilty of that. Because it's very easy "I want nothing more to do with you. You've done this crap thing. You don't seem to care about it, so therefore I don't want to know you." But maybe, having to talk about those difficult things and having to have them between you and work out is important. Hold them to account and all of the difficult things that that brings with it.

B I think we're invested in our friendships. If something is happening with somebody we're close to, then psychologically that reflects on us as well so that we can feel we need to whitewash it, or distance us from complicity.

A If we take the word 'community' to mean anything (and it can sometimes be essentialising and unhelpful), if we really think we're accountable to each other as a community, it means that we have to reflect on ways that we've enabled or refused to acknowledge abuse and what structures allowed that to arise. It's really hard for your politics and emotional wellbeing to be in this constant state of questioning. But where

else can the commitment to transformative change come from? Certainly not from complacency about abuse. How do we make this process of constant critical thinking and action widespread? Most people I know who are doing this work already are constantly over-stretched without others willing to share the load. More people need to take on that work, especially those who benefit from relative protection as a result of their race, class, gender identity or able-bodiedness.

C Yes. There's a limit to what you can deal with. You can be tired; you can go through that discomfort, but if everyone else isn't as well, then it's pointless.

A The same few people are the ones who are constantly exhausted by it. Then people burn out and those that should be holding one another to account close ranks.

C There's also a dismissal of the people who are shouting about it, the same old constant undermining: "You're just being divisive. You're giving other people fuel to fight us. We shouldn't be infighting." That whole weaponisation "You're just playing out the vendetta you've always had with this person. You're just So I just think it's useful to mention that we're having" and all the other micro acts of undermining. And yes, then you get worn out and fed up and just give up.

B On a more structural note, I think you've made the point, or it's sort of implied there, that the problem is trying to devise accountability processes when you're in the middle of needing it. It's far too late. So, ideally one would do it as part of the group but then most groups are so busy, it's sometimes also very dif-

***“Prioritising people's safety and protecting people from harm, especially those who face greater vulnerability, as a starting point.”***

difficult to say let's sit down and work with this- we don't have the capacity.

**C** In the group I organise with the most, we had a get-together on Skype. We wanted to create this accountability process. We haven't needed it yet, thankfully. But we do need something in place. I was one of the people putting together questions for it and bringing together the information. We met in August and people have all answered the questions. But I haven't collated them yet and this signifies part of the danger - we're all so busy and part of it I think is I'm consciously thinking "we're doing okay", so there's not that push for urgency. It's difficult to do, even in the abstract.

**A** It's also important that people are being held to account when they put you in political harm - e.g. either with police or journalists. There are ways in which people operate in spaces where they can move with protection that others do not have. If we think about solidarity and minimising harm, that also means taking into account how some groups are more at risk from the state etc. and how our actions might perpetuate that harm.

**C** Do you know what I think part of the problem is? It involves changing the way people think. And you can't. You can't. That has to come from themselves.

**B** Yes. But it also has to come from hearing the very things we've started to talk about. And it's the way you listen. And it's why it's important to listen.

**A** If we believe in abolition, if we really believe that we can have a better way of living, we have to embed processes for accountability and supporting survivors of violence into all of our politics. But again, whose responsibility is it to ensure that this happens? Because I'm tired of talking about this all the time and I know a lot of people that feel the same.

**C** And then, what do you do with people who still claim it doesn't apply to them? I was having a conversation with a friend about different ways of organising community groups and different ways of living. And we were talking about accountability and crime and our end thing was, well, in the end they really wouldn't, they really wouldn't, you'd just have to put them in a boat. Put them in a boat and make it float away so they couldn't harm anyone else.

**A** And maybe we just need to form vigilante gangs that hunt down and beat the shit out of abusive men.

**C** Don't put that in.

**base** *But this is important - this is where a basic necessity of safety meets capacity, right? If you're going to force people into dangerous situations, when they've no capacity left for dealing with the harm, they're going to have to seek the other necessary options. So in some*

*ways this is exactly the kind of warning that does need publishing, and it's essential that people realise the result of a lack of ability to reduce harm any other way but the immediate physical removal of danger.*

**A** People may know on a political level why it has been important for people of colour, specifically black people, to be able to fight and arm themselves - so why can't we do that against dangerous abusers when we don't want to perpetuate carceral systems? Most of the people I've had these discussions with are women and non binary people who are constantly having to have the same discussions about abuse and it gets tiring. We can skill up to fight because if that's the thing that makes them afraid, let's make them afraid. Similarly, I know that this form of violence isn't so different from the violence we're opposing.

**B** Yes. I mean, I'm wholly against violence against anybody.

**A** I mean, I'm not going around just starting fights with people. But it feels a necessary thing, that this is a level that we've got to now.

**B** But that worries me very much. We start off from a point of reason and a point of necessity, but then, and I think American gun laws is a good example, where I'm sure when that was first put in the constitution there was a really good reason for it - but the moment it was used by marginalised communities for self defence, it was totally abused and we see that its deployment is just another aspect of the oppressions and harm we see elsewhere.

**C** I think that people are tired and fed up, just wishing people would get on with it, but it feels impossible sometimes. I recognise that there are certain people who are called on all the time, who always show up and do the work, and that shouldn't be the case. But I can't help but think that is also necessary right now? It's all so imperfect and this is part of that but the people who do so much of the work do still need to be relied on. What's important though is that there should be less of an expectation on them to do it and I don't think that there's always space for them to go, "I'm not doing this anymore, I've had enough, I've done enough". That is very valid response that should be respected, but I do understand the need to ask those people for help.

**A** This work needs to be better understood as a site of education. Often you get this imperative propagated in online thinkpieces that "this is what you all need to do to be better". We could all sit here and issue commands. Sometimes it can be useful, but I know I don't learn when someone's simply commanding a change. I become resentful and non-compliant. I don't want the work we do to just add to a chorus of people saying, 'do this, do that, you're all doing it all wrong'. I mean, I

do think some people are doing things wrong (!), but I don't think it's useful to present a list of wrongs. It keeps coming back to finding more energy to continue this dialogue, which more people need to do.

**B** Just from an education point of view, it's far more effective to demonstrate the effect of what this harm is doing, presenting how we can change and work together.

**A** I wanted to ask you a question. You've been at all this longer than us, and is this just a thing that keeps coming around every few years that just gets worse and worse, is it something that's gotten worse over time do you think or were there better ways of intervening before that don't exist now?

**B** Of course there were women's groups and consciousness raising groups to try to raise awareness amongst each other, supported by the feminist movement, but actually things have moved on and I think that there's much more awareness now; and still a growing awareness. My experience, historically, is that the victims were seen as a problem. My personal experience, professionally, was as a woman in the 60s and 70s working in the computer industry... apart from anything else I was totally isolated most of the time and I couldn't really speak out and I wasn't really aware actually, as far as being aware myself, of what abuse was going on and the subtle ways that people were reacting to me - some of the things were very obvious though. I think there's much more awareness now and much more willingness to tackle it and think about it, and understand what it is and listen to other points of view, which is good.

**A** Even over the last few years I feel there's been a shift in how we're able to talk more openly about abuse, but how has that improved our support for those making disclosures? We haven't spoken about the influence of online spaces. There are people who talk about social media being toxic, who criticise 'call out culture', but often these critiques are a way of distracting from the individual's own harmful behaviour. When we were talking earlier about formalising the networks that we've always had to warn each other, the internet and social media have offered this to some extent - an ability to make anonymous disclosures and connect with others.

**base** *There are so many subtleties when it comes to successful accountability, because it's all so imperfect. In that example, for instance, you were taking the responsibility of not undermining necessary political work that was happening. But that seems to take a toll too - of knowing that you would have to deal with the fallout, including the anger of friends and comrades who might feel they're been kept in the dark - how do you manage that boundary*

*between necessity and safety?*

**A** Prioritising people's safety and protecting people from harm, especially those who face greater vulnerability, as a starting point. Examine how people in organising spaces put others at risk - call out events and spaces that don't foreground people's safety. This seems the basis for each of our politics here: how do we keep people around us safe and make sure that they're not further harmed by these systems that have already created immeasurable harm?

**B** Because that's what we're working for isn't it? Enabling people to live well? We're working towards bringing down these structures.

**base** *That's basically what people call prefigurative right? In that how we empower, how we organise, resist or whatever terminology we want to use - we're actually trying to put the foundations for a new way of relating to one another. And we see that in a lot of left spaces as well as thinking about accountability around survivorship but for ableism and its exclusionary nature too - this seems a basic call for that kind of project yes?*

**A** I think it's also really important that we make it clear this isn't about expecting people to become experts in theory, or have complex knowledge of feminist academia, it's actually about basic decency. It's having care for people around you. There's a list as long as my arm of text that I still need to read and things I still can't get my head round. But that's an excuse too often wheeled out and has been used as a weapon against feminist groups attempting to de-centre whiteness - where people always claim it's too difficult to talk about these concepts, when it's not.

**B** But that's another way of excluding people. You don't have to be formally educated or "well read" or whatever it is.

**A** Absolutely. Most of my politics haven't been shaped by academia, but learning from my organising and others around me about how I need to be more responsible to, and for, other people. In the left there are plenty of people who can use particular language and concepts, such as anti-prison thinking and writing, and the discourse of black feminism, to justify abusive behaviours and structures. It goes back to what we were saying earlier - that we don't have a particular protected status or better understanding just because we're people of colour, women or survivors. Clearly, we can all manipulate situations and we can all cause harm. For now, it seems like discussions of that may continue to have to happen in private. I know that when I try and discuss this publicly, it still gets picked on by people who want to attack these ideas - but it would be good to be able to safely challenge this stuff more.

***"This isn't about expecting people to become experts in theory, or have complex knowledge of feminist academia"***





"WHAT RISEUP HAVE DONE IN CREATING A PLATFORM IS ONLY ONE PARTICULAR TECHNICAL MANOEUVRE. BUT BENEATH THIS COMPOSITION THERE'S A KIND-OF CREATIVE THINKING IN REGARDS TO THE TECHNICAL THAT WE SHOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE, TO UNDERCUT A READING OF THE DIGITAL AS *WHAT'S GIVEN*."

## Dead Canaries

**"Listen to the Hummingbird  
Whose wings you cannot see  
Listen to the Hummingbird  
Don't listen to me"** ~ @riseupnet

In late 2016 a Canary died. The US-based Riseup collective - provider of secure email hosting, mailing lists, virtual private networks, online anonymity services and group collaboration tools - triggered a public alert by deliberately failing to update an online statement within a previously agreed timeframe. 'The Canary' statement was designed as a warning to flag any legal process imposed upon Riseup, such as the receipt of a 'gag order' preventing the disclosure of information relating to any state issuance of warrants, court orders, etc. As such a provision would legally prohibit the collective from talking about a legal order, the Canary lets its authors sidestep any violation of the order precisely by not communicating within the previously established timeframe. In so doing they sound the alarm to anyone expecting to hear an update - anyone seeking assurances as to whether the security of Riseup's services may have been compromised.

Fast forward a few weeks past the Canary deadline into late November and the collective were able to issue some updates, reassuring their user-base that there was no need to panic and that further information would be forthcoming. In time Riseup disclosed the circumstances under which the Canary died: the receipt of sealed FBI warrants targeting two accounts hosted on their servers. The collective had been left with the choice to comply and adhere to the constraints against speaking out in gag provisions attached to the warrants, disobey and risk jail time and/or termination of the organisation and its services, or shut down and pull their services offline for their entire international community, including many in need of maintaining secure channels of communication.

Determining that the targeted accounts were involved in "non-political" acts of "selfish opportunism" that violated the social contract of the host (the accounts were serving ransomware and a DDoS extortion ring), Riseup complied with the orders for user information relating to the two accounts - a decision motivated by an interest in maintaining and protecting services for their many thousands of other users.

Sidestepping a limited moral exposition of the decisions Riseup made prior to, during and in the aftermath of the death of the Canary, we would instead like to reach further into these digital currents, to draw out a sense of the social, and of our movement, within.

We recognise a familiar jaded response towards state surveillance and digital tech that this topic can give rise to. We may think: *we're fucked anyway, that this is beyond my understanding or doesn't affect me, or that total privacy is impossible so we'll have to live and organise in spite of its absence*. While this latter response may appear more than reasonable in a great many circumstances, it's useful to recognise the active nature of surveillance that seeks an increasingly diminishing gap between the subject and their digital reflection in forms of governance so heavily articulated by data, constructed in digital architecture. The social relation is technical - at least insofar as relations between individuals are mediated and understood as such. As this governance and influence stretches into organising spaces, right into our lives, it is perhaps more useful to look at cryptoculture and digital security practices not as belonging to a separate realm that we enter into already defeated, but as an extension of social relations of trust and affinity. And here, as even Riseup professed: fundamentally, their users must to some extent place their trust in the collective.

In any form of organising that presents agitation to everyday state violence, we find the *more-than-reasonable* assumption that targeted surveillance is a possibility. In the UK, the ongoing inquiry into undercover policing by the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) continues to reveal some extent of the targeting by 'spycops' of political groups, organisers and activists between the late 1960s and the present.

To date, the inquiry has revealed that throughout the past 40 years, 200 officers infiltrated more than 1,000 political groups; from anti-fascists, anarchists, environmental activists and hunt saboteurs and across a broad spectrum of campaigners, families and friends, such as individuals involved in the Stephen Lawrence justice campaign. The revelations around procedures

followed by the SDS bring to light the malicious nature and tactics employed by these operations and state actors, such as the frequent use by officers of the true identities of deceased children in the creation of their own fake names and the sexual and psychological abuse of campaigners by undercover police.

In parallel with these revelations, there has also been no shortage of threats towards the limiting of what has become more widespread adoption of end-to-end encryption privacy services in recent years - supported by the likes of everyday tools such as Signal Messenger - via the rhetoric of state 'regulation' of comms tech (here, as with spycops, often conjuring 'extremism' as a catch-all justification). Against these tendencies, the state spares no expense in their attempt to preserve the anonymity of their own, even when under scrutiny in the courts.

Beyond mere passive surveillance, the history of spycops also reveals the active influence of state actors in social movements. Mark Kennedy, an undercover officer who shot to headlines when unmasked in 2010, had not only observed but influenced the movements he had been part of. Alongside a legacy of numerous intimate and inherently abusive relationships with activists in the UK and across Europe, in Copenhagen, 2009, Kennedy was influential in the formation of a network under the initiative "*Never Trust a Cop*" as well as facilitating a number of actions in the UK, Iceland and elsewhere. Other police officers whose identities have been revealed used *divide-and-rule* tactics of gossiping and shit-stirring among friends and comrades to break the relations of trust and friendship that underpin any effective prefigurative community (See for example Marco Jacobs, who while undercover in Cardiff, worked hard to sow distrust, dislike and suspicion. Connected with an action against a

pipeline terminal, all criminal prosecutions ultimately collapsed, but only after police had raided houses and obtained computer equipment in what seems to have been a massive fishing expedition). Despite persistent efforts and an ongoing legal case, the British state is resisting in every way possible revelations relating to the extent of their spying.

In software and in everyday life, we find ourselves swarming in cop-infested waters that not only trace and observe dissent but actively influence, intimidate and coerce. As our movement ebbs and flows within these currents, the more fundamental questions, then, are ones of trust and composition: *how can we trust each other, and how can we have each others' backs?*

The courts frequently throw up transcripts of many months of text messages sent between individuals. Sometimes, as in the Welling anti-fascist trial, the only purpose for this seems to be to turn friends against each other where the relevance of messages to the case at hand is decidedly tenuous. Messages can only serve this purpose when they are made easily available: when *easy-to-use* encrypted communication channels are spurned. At the time of the Welling case, options were somewhat limited, but today we are fortunate to be able to take advantage of platforms and protocols that are convenient and simple enough for everyday use.

As well as the swift adoption of the tools we have to hand, there is also a simple but effective kind of savviness around communication that we should like to encourage. Have you ever overheard someone loudly recount without restraint or considerations on how even words and posturing entangle ourselves and oth-







ers? The concrete effects of this can be seen with the 2011 “riots” after which many ended up doing time, and were marked forever as troublemakers, for information themselves or their friends fed into Facebook and elsewhere online. Even worse than speaking of one’s own involvement, social practices of sharing information about others – a performance of being ‘in-the-know’, about who knows who, who is a participant in what activities, or what an old friend’s multiple pseudonyms have been – must be recognised and challenged.

There is a kind of special sense to ‘affinity’ among those organising together that we don’t often acknowledge, perhaps half the time because we’re so caught up in our own internal battles. But it’s at this point, refining this, and being prepared to hold ourselves and each other to account, that we’re more likely to refine a sense of *trust-through-accountability* that prefigures the social composition we desire. It’s likely that we’re targeted, that we’ve been in proximity to the extensions of state surveillance and influence – but what’s even more likely is that those we’re in affinity with are the majority; and here, learning how to be with each other, is where our endeavour resides.

Extending this sense of affinity, accountability and prefigurative relations into our digital lives, we can recognise that one of the key ways in which digital technologies may debilitate us as a community is in making us dependent on convenience at the expense

of independence and autonomy. If sovereignty can be understood as a sense of supreme decision-making power, technological sovereignty relates to this flow of power among the everyday deployment and composition of software ecologies and digital tools, how they are used and what acts upon the user when they are used; *what is the social contract between the user and the provider of the tool, and how is the tool developed and deployed?*

At present, many of us swiftly hand over large amounts of personal and social information in exchange for convenience and efficiency of communication. We give away so much, leaving ourselves incredibly vulnerable to surveillance and repression. Few of us relate in a deliberate or conscious way to the power dynamics inherent in this when we refuse to take a little time to reflect on the technological choices we want to make (that jaded sense previously alluded to). It’s worth noting that our actions here expose not only our individual selves but also our broader networks – and this should make us think twice about the impact our activity has in this extended, social sense.

What Riseup have done in creating a platform is only one particular technical manoeuvre. But beneath this composition there’s a kind of creative thinking in regards to the technical that we should like to encourage, to undercut a reading of the digital as *what’s given*. Riseup – like very few similar services out there – exists to provide an alternative to state surveillance and commercially-inclined digital communications services that restrict freedom and are lacking or actively intrusive when it comes to user privacy. The ‘full take’ of the Internet and ‘association mapping’ of users’ social graphs by surveillance apparatus in the UK, the US, and elsewhere, gives states the ability to build a detailed map of organisations, social movements, activist and grassroots groups. Countering this, Riseup attempts to situate communication tools within the control of movement organisations, whilst providing technical design and trust-based assurances towards user privacy and anonymity. Speaking on the Canary incident, “Crossbill” from the Riseup collective calls for more creative diversity in this space:

*“We need similar projects. We need to decentralise and spread out so we can create a more healthy eco-system instead of [Riseup] becoming a gmail monoculture.”*

Running a platform for web services, email hosting or messaging are awesome examples of the counterpower of contemporary indymedia – decentralising networks and making surveillance harder, sharing the responsibility and bringing relations of trust closer to home.

Whether we as individuals have developed technical

skills and interests or not, we can recognise, adopt and support initiatives towards regaining autonomy and independence in our relationship to technology through our everyday behaviours. Just as there are those who commit many hours to creating and maintaining social centres, squats, street resistance to fascism or solidarity with migrant communities, there are also those whose particular skills and interests reside more so in tools and technology. Benefiting from our ability to extend trust through affinity, we need not each of us individually burden ourselves with learning all the intricate details. We would, however, do well to take the advice shared with us by those in affinity who have, and who have invested many hours in creating platforms and protocols – digital infrastructures – that facilitate our clawing back of technological autonomy from those who benefit from us being cast adrift in these waters.

As users who benefit from such autonomous infrastructures, we can also support and encourage the proliferation and decentralisation of secure digital communication platforms by not offloading all of our decisions and responsibility onto those who collectively work across borders in supplying the means to digitally mask-up. We can instead aim to extend our own localised affinities into the digital in such ways that alter our relationship from that of consumer (or product, in the eyes of the companies who run many of the tools that we use) to one of reciprocity, or mutual aid.

Just as when we use a social centre, we clean up after ourselves, or share our learnings from facilitating meetings in order to support those who put in day-to-day effort to keep vital activities moving, if we were to decentralise, re-design and even adopt end-to-end encryption as standard, the legal and coercive pressures facing a handful of tech collectives holding our backs would be significantly diminished by their removal as gatekeepers of surveilled information.

It’s a curious point to note that the design and composition of the computer-user finds its origins in productivity, as first and foremost a method for conceiving and accounting for a person’s own time in relation to work. The historic emergence of time-sharing in computer processing bestowed names upon individual users, positioning them as individual units of productive, economic value. The digital subject – the individual/the user – is above all this construct of productivity, extended now across device and platform (the personal computer, mobile phone, email account, social network).

One thing we take from this observation is that conceiving of contemporary software ecology as the inevitable or ideal result of modelling technologies for human-computer interaction, is far from accurate.



Instead these technologies can be seen to trace a historic emergence in labour that links the end-user to productive and regulatory interests rather than any alternative, utopian or emancipatory design. Responding to observations of this origin story, the poet and media scholar Tung-Hui Hu describes the Cloud as:

*“... a subtle weapon that translates the body into usable information. Despite this violence, it functions primarily as a banal ideology that convinces us [...] that identifying ourselves is the ‘normal way of registering into the mechanism and transmission of the state.’”*

This design – this *what’s given* – is neither inevitable nor fixed. There are many potential configurations here. The tendency within digitality towards compositions of the ‘discrete’ compliments the clean distinctions of individuals, the boundaries of the self, and facilitates the extension of the ideologies that underpin our social configuration; productivity and separation. Beneath all of this, technical infrastructure is one with material and social structures such as spaces, social centres and relations of affinity – both prefigurative and at the same time essential. As our social composition and our ability to both trust and challenge, and to be held to account, both underpins and extends beneath the technical extensions of ourselves, so here do we seek, in design, a kind of queerness that comes from our own reclamation, attendance to, or disruption of these technologies.

CONTENT NOTE: THE IMAGES ON THIS SPREAD EXPLICITLY CONCERN THEMES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, DEALING WITH THE PERPETUATION OF SYSTEMS OF ABUSE AND THE RE-TRAUMATISATION OF SURVIVORS

## Stigmata (series) 2017

Both unsettlingly personal and stridently political, *Stigmata* presents the dichotomy within which rape survivors are positioned: simultaneously objectified by a disciplinary gaze, their history interrogated in perpetuum for cracks. At first glance provocative, the discomfort for the survivor of living in a rape-filled world is displaced onto the captured audience. Tension arises when the posing is no longer decipherable as enticing or protective amidst the context of the words occupy-

ing the frame. Taken directly from responses given to the survivor upon disclosing her truth, the strenuous emotional labour of survivorhood is hinted at in the methods of reproducing these remarks onto the body. Facing further disruption by the formal presentation of the work, *Stigmata* aims to expose the everyday discursive construction of the raped body, and the alienation fostered by the enforced habitation of this embodiment. [lynsayhodges.wordpress.com](http://lynsayhodges.wordpress.com)





