

Homelessness Abolitionists Political Analysis - Summary Doc

We are a collective of people who have experienced homelessness that have been meeting together weekly since Monday October 21st 2024. Our aim has been to politically analyse why homelessness happens and how to abolish it. For us the personal is political. Politics is how the everyday decisions made by those in power relate to our lives and what we want to do about it.

At this moment the most general statement of our politics is that we are actively committed to the struggle to abolish homelessness. Through our analysis we've learnt that abolishing homelessness cannot be separated from abolishing oppressive institutional systems e.g. legal, policing, prison and homelessness systems. We've also learnt that abolishing homelessness cannot be separated from abolishing systems of oppression that play out through our behaviour and interpersonal relationships such as classism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, islamaphobia, anti-semitism, ableism and xenophobia.

Our task has been to develop an analysis of the conditions that create and maintain homelessness in Sheffield, the UK and the world. Then to use this as a basis to understand what we can do about it. We know people who have died whilst experiencing homelessness and we grieve this with rage. We see homelessness abolition as one movement within the anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, political movements that are needed to combat oppression in this messed up socio-economic-cultural-political moment.

We would like to honour the work of the black feminist *Combee River Collective* and their statement published in April 1977. This document is directly inspired by their work. We are committed to honouring the revolutionary lineages that we come from.

This summary document will explore four major topics;

1. The origin of homelessness abolition
2. What we believe i.e. the specifics of our politics
3. The problems in organising people experiencing homelessness
4. Homelessness abolitionist issues and practise

1.The Origin of Homelessness Abolition

Homelessness is historical. We haven't studied deeply enough to know exactly when the ideas of home and homelessness developed. We have a gut feeling it came with kings wanting to own land, with empires, with cities, with the colonisation of one people or community or culture for the superiority of another. Homelessness is displacement and colonisation. It is the criminalization of people moving freely between places.

Homelessness is also happening now. Homelessness is transnational companies taking control of, commodifying, buying and selling the natural landscape because of their potential for luxury flats and offices. Homelessness is the war declared in order to trade weapons, the displacement and killing of people for profit in the Congo, in the Sahel, in Sudan, in Syria, in Palestine, in Myanmar, in Kurdistan and in Ukraine. It is urban cleansing and gentrification. It is the pollution of the land which is becoming more inhabitable with natural disasters such as heatwaves, hurricanes, thunderstorms, floods.

Homelessness is a life-and-death struggle for survival. This struggle is for freedom. It is for the ability to be able to change conditions.

Despite the universal right to adequate standard of living (CESCR 1948) there are 271,000 people registered as homeless in the UK and 150 million people experiencing homelessness across the world. This is only the registered & recorded people. Immigration laws criminalise people who migrate, which means that there are also 11.7 million undocumented people, many of whom experience homelessness.

The lives of people in our group and those we know who have experienced homelessness are stories of care leavers, addicts, children of addicts, people who migrated for a better life, people being arrested, people in and out of prison, people not being able to receive benefits, people being queer and othered, people experiencing domestic violence, people having relationship breakdowns, people being poisoned by carbon monoxide and people living in horrific conditions in temporary accommodation. Through analysis we realised that homelessness does not exist in isolation; it is not just homelessness. Homelessness is linked with mental health, relationships, unemployment, prison, low wages, high taxes for working class people and global crises.

For people experiencing homelessness it's hard to vote, find work, access education, healthcare, meet with & make friends/family, cook and have autonomy and freedom. People experiencing homelessness are alienated and trapped. They are also people who are discriminated against for gender, sexuality, race, culture, religious belief, disability, age etc. Communities have forgotten how to love and co-exist with people experiencing homelessness. We single them out, blame them and view homelessness as an individual issue instead of something that is happening in our communities, to all of us. We have forgotten how connected we all are.

People experiencing homelessness are criminalised by global systems. These systems include the legal system, the media, the education system, the political system, the economic system, the benefits system and the housing system. For example, people who have no place to stay are criminalised for "loitering" in public spaces. Or people who flee their own countries due to war, climate disaster or political conditions are criminalised for not having visas and then painted as "job stealers" by the media. The value underlying these systems is profit making. They say; 'rich people good, poor people bad', 'own your homes', 'protect your nation at the expense of others', 'justice is something rich people can buy', 'rely on the state to make change.' Western countries spread lies that underpin their sham democracies to countries in the global majority. They tell countries they have colonised how to be democratic when really they are corrupt and neo-colonial. Western countries support dictators in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. For example in Cameroon where, since 2016, French and British colonialism has resulted in civil war. These dictators maintain economic and political conditions that increase migration and homelessness.

People who work in these systems are made to enforce cruel rules like curfews, anti-social-behavior orders, public space protection orders, sanctions and sections. The power to do this is granted by laws related to squatting, public space protection, right to buy, homelessness reduction, immigration, marriage, land and local connection. These laws do

not regulate the housing market or make it easy to build new council house stock. These laws contradict human rights laws. They protect the rich and kill the poor. The legal system is corrupt, it can't be trusted. The people in these systems make decisions that create and maintain homelessness; economists, politicians, journalists, CEO's, capitalists, landowners, developers, corporate billionaires, oligarchs, landlords, royal families, rich people, governments, NATO, the UN, the Refugee Commission and more. We've been told we're powerless. That we need to rely on the state and government systems to fix homelessness. In reality those in power have created a homelessness-industrial-complex that profits off of people's suffering. The hard truth is that we, as individuals and as communities, also have power and can decide whether to maintain homelessness or abolish it. Realising this is terrifying and overwhelming because it is to know that we've been taught is a lie. But it is also hopeful.

Working class communities have always resisted homelessness. Some examples are; The Squatters movement, Tent City, Glasgow Rent Strike, Fred Hampton & the Black Power Movement, Grenfell organising groups, The Aylesbury Estate, London Renters Union, Housing Southwark & Lambeth. But we don't know enough because these stories often aren't told by mainstream media. This is mostly because those in power don't want us to know the power we have. Those in power fund social justice movements but it's really a ploy to avoid tax & control resistance. The rich put money into trust funds which means they get taxed less and then 'give' 5% of their wealth to 'social justice' movements. Then the funders, who are allied with people who have trust funds, dictate who is funded and what they can do. They fund NGOs and large organisations in the housing movement that focus on policy change and campaigning. This deliberately waters down the revolutionary politics of people's movements. They give to middle class people with weak political vision. They increase our reliance on corrupt systems because it keeps them in power.

Those in power own the media and spread misinformation that divides communities and makes people distrust each other. This makes way for the rise of fascism, for war becoming something people accept, for gentrification becoming something people accept. Those in power count on people being scared and divided and clinging to old forms of power. They know this stops them being part of creating something new.

2. What We Believe i.e. the Specifics of Our Politics

We are Homelessness Abolitionists. We share the belief that people experiencing homelessness are valuable. The only people who know what the life and death struggle of experiencing homelessness really means is those who have experienced it. We are the only ones who care enough to liberate ourselves.

We know that the majority of society has been told to blame and scapegoat working class people, that they are scared of us and don't trust us, even within our movements. We will no longer wait for them to organise us, we are the leaders we've always needed.

We believe that this struggle is about loving ourselves and our community. It is about loving God and the hope God symbolises. We've been taught that the power to end homelessness lies with the government, the state, the lawyers, the politicians, those with money and resources. But this is an old colonial lie, that tells us we need more and more profit to survive

and that there therefore has to be someone at 'the bottom' doing the work. We believe that it is the capitalist legacy of colonialism that we must liberate all people from.

We have the power to create new systems built on love for all people. We can do this through creating new internal systems within ourselves, new relationships between us and new systems in our communities. Personal transformation, interpersonal transformation and community transformation cannot be separated, they are connected. Relating to ourselves, others and our communities in ways that love, heal and liberate rather than punish, criminalise and exploit is abolition.

We want to move people to get involved in initiatives that can prevent and affect homelessness. We want to involve people experiencing homelessness from the beginning. We want to get it early on, at the beginning of the idea, to kill it at the source.

We want people who are experiencing homelessness to make decisions to disrupt the systems that create and maintain it. We want real, not co-opted, grassroots democracy. When developers follow corrupt laws and play political games, we want to be there and intervene in the decision making. We believe that people who've experienced homelessness making decisions about their community is part of abolishing homelessness. We need to do both the work of dismantling the oppressive capitalist systems that maintain homelessness and also the work of taking responsibility for our communities and making sure people aren't being made homeless. We need to resource people to show up, lead and intervene in how cities, towns, villages, communities and societies are designed, planned, built, experienced and organised.

We believe that building trust across differences is vital and revolutionary. We will show up for each other, prioritise each other, spend time with each other, listen to each other, get to know each other, give each other time, be patient with each other, be face to face with one another, respect one another and have fun with each other. We will create safety between us. This means having long-term commitment to each other where we navigate through conflict and hard times and don't give up.

We believe that working class people experiencing homelessness are leaders and we want to build trust with them and organise with them. How can we ask them to trust us if we don't trust each other? We need to set an example.

We believe it is time to unite people who've been taught to distrust each other. We believe that the liberation of all oppressed people means the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism. This is not reform, this is revolution.

We believe that material resources need to be equally distributed rather than extracted & sold for profit. This is the end of capitalism. We're only just starting to imagine what it looks like. Many more powerful minds are needed to imagine with us. To create. We need to plant trees. We need to re-establish relationships with our lands.

3. The Problems in Organising People Experiencing Homelessness

People think that charities & the social justice sector are ending homelessness. But despite good intentions it is very clear that they aren't. Numbers of people experiencing homelessness across the globe increase as do the number of people who die whilst homeless. Capitalism, or in other words our current "free market" economic and political system, has created conditions that mean charities & social justice organisations have to run like businesses. They need more and more money to survive. Charities are made to compete for resources when resources could just be redistributed to poor communities. Everything has become an industry, an industrial complex. Single Housing Project (SHP) makes £41 million pound profit a year. This is one charity, imagine how much all the homelessness charities make combined. It is disgusting. Imagine how many council homes could be built with £41 million. Imagine how much money for working class people to make decisions and rebuild their communities that could be.

The charity industrial complex, the social justice industrial complex, the homelessness industrial complex and the funding industrial complex are all just people being lied to and told to compete for funding by capitalism. Yes, schemes such as housing first have had an impact, but until we end capitalism, this impact will always be built on some people somewhere having to suffer.

Often, social justice organisations in the housing movement such as 'think tanks' and 'campaigns' don't build relationships with those in working class communities. They distrust the people, they don't understand them. They are scared of them because they haven't learnt to embrace and be curious about our differences. While the housing movement is not as white and middle-class as other movements, for example the climate movement, it is still not representative of underclass and working class people including black and brown underclass and working class people. This means that our movements have weak, un-revolutionary politics. The media has distorted the idea of organizing rooted in identity. The "woke identity politics" which gets criticised today originally came from the African American struggle to end slavery and was part of a liberatory process of African people acknowledging their identity as oppressed black people and choosing to fight this. Capitalism has made identity politics something that can be branded, brought and sold. It has taken something liberatory away from its root and created a counter-narrative of "anti-wokeism" that keeps the capitalist system at the center. It has made identity based organising a weapon that causes people to distrust each other. This distracts us from the real work of uniting the people who've experienced different forms of oppression. Because of this working class people don't realise that their freedom is dependent on the freedom of other oppressed people, of migrants, of queer folks, of palestinians, of jewish people, of all people, of all animals, plants and organisms.

Social media is owned by people in power and spreads lies that divide us. Trumps, Putins and Musks control the votes so 'the left' has become scared of losing and is weak, watered down and centrist. We have politicians like Keir Starmer who blame working class people for homelessness and cut benefits. Socialism has died.

People experiencing homelessness are surviving in life and death situations. We often fear it will be hard to organise with these people. In our community in Sheffield 4 people have died whilst experiencing homelessness in the last 4 months. The psychological toll that homelessness has on people cannot be underestimated. 'It's not a joke.' We need to be

patient with people. We need to understand their situations. We want to resource people experiencing homelessness to think deeply in order to connect their personal experiences with the roots of colonial oppression. We're scared, but in reality the people already know and often our distrust of them is due to our own social conditioning. We've been taught to distrust people. We've internalised this stuff. We need to unlearn it.

We aren't connected enough with liberation movements across the world, because we're "too busy", because we fear each other and because the media doesn't want us to know they are happening. We need to build relationships with those fighting capitalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism in all countries. This is sustainability and resilience.

It's a huge task and will take hard work & energy. We need to build enough power to re-create the foundations that underpin global systems and at the same time we need to survive in capitalism. We need to resource ourselves to do this work. But if we apply for funding we risk the funders dictating what we can do and weakening our politics. We risk becoming reliant on the funding industrial complex. Without money and resources we will struggle to survive. How do we resource ourselves and stay true to our politics? Where else can resources come from? We need to be self-sufficient and sustainable. We must not become another organisation wanting more and more and more. We need to practise how to create a new economic system that redistributes resources so that people can self-organise without relying on the state. We need to practise reparations and develop leaders that are skilled in creating reparative social systems. We know that "good things are always hard to build and easy to fuck up". We need to find ways to stay strong when we get bad news. We need to pray together. We know we will experience success and defeat, joy & pain, victory and failure. And.... we want to bring a message of hope and a belief. We want to get needed support from each other. Hold each other through. Show people that there is a way through homelessness, through mess. We want to be living proof that things can change. We know there is something spiritual in this practice, that it takes discipline. We ask our ancestors, our gods, our belief systems to hold us as we learn.

We believe in the people. We stay positive and build relationships with them because we know that two people, three people, five people are better than one. The success of building and maintaining these relationships of trust strongly depends on the individual and common values that exist in our group.

We need to consolidate our values and develop a strategy. Now we have understood why homelessness happens and seen what else we need to learn, we need to strategise, what is it we are going to do? How else can we bring others into this learning?

There is a lot we don't know yet, we need more brains, more space for deepening our understanding but we also need to respond to the needs of people and communities that are experiencing homelessness now. We want to show up for people by bringing them what they need. We want this to be our approach to outreach. We want the people to see us as an embodiment of our politics.

4. Homelessness Abolitionist Issues and Practise

We are in a process of getting clear on our values, principles, politics & ideology so that they

can inform our practice and our actions.

So far, the values that hold us are... being direct, being fair, feeding people, caring for the environment, being happy, making others smile, solving problems together, practising faith, thinking positively and creatively, supporting each other, not focusing on money, focusing on helping others, being accountable, having hope.

These are the things we live by our compass, our standards of behaviour. They will change & grow as we get older and wiser. For now, this is what we have to hold us to what we say we're going to do.

How we build relationships with each other is our politics. We are deciding together how we will deal with conflict. Hard things are bound to come up and we need to be resilient. So far, we've decided to.... embrace and accept difference and disagreement, to be curious about our differences, to listen to each other, to ask each other to explain, to decide what to do when conflict arises together, to hear both sides, to find the parts that can converge, to talk with our wider network, to vote, to try consensus, to explore just sitting with it, to explore the difference between disagreement and harm, to mediate, to build awareness of different conflict styles, to give people space to calm down, to reflect on our own privileges, to trust others to tell us our blind spots, to explain to people why we think they are biased and give them clear feedback, to know ourselves, to know our strengths and weaknesses and to apologise and change when harm is caused. This work is deep, personal and inter-personal. It requires self-awareness and reflection. It requires care and an ability to criticise ourselves and each other with love rather than discouragement. Our shared vision of homelessness abolition is the thing that holds us together. We seek to be honest with each other if it seems like things are in conflict with our shared vision. If an idea seems misaligned with our vision we might 'put it in the fridge for a while' and leave it there if it never seems to align.

There are many issues and projects we might work on. We will use our analysis to inform the decisions we make about action. We've realised that we need alternatives to the current education system which is based on the values that create and maintain homelessness. We want to create new, liberatory methods of education. We want to bring people experiencing homelessness into the process of thinking more and more critically about why it happens and what we might do about it. We might build 'liberation schools' where people experiencing homelessness can be resourced to deepen their political analysis and develop their leadership. These will be places where we learn how to free ourselves. But what are we freeing ourselves from? From internalised systems of oppression? from colonialism? from misinformation? from distrust of each other? Freedom schools will be places where we learn how to take responsibility for each other and our communities. Part of this will be supporting each other in solidarity not as a service or charity. Those seeking asylum need support with getting papers. People need support filling out forms. People need housing advice. People need tents to sleep in, storage and healthcare that doesn't discriminate against them. People need love, food, clothes, needle banks, and tea. These are some needs we are aware of but we need to ask communities what they need and show up to meet them.

Our work is also to build relationships with anti-colonial struggles across the world and link these movements to the people in our communities. It is to challenge with deep deep love, the sexism, racism and xenophobia of working class people and of all people. Our work is to

practise new ways of building deep, non-exploitative, relationships, not 'cancelling' each other but becoming evermore dedicated to building the strength and solidarity of our communities. Our work is to trust in God. Our work is to use social media in new ways that show complexities and nuance rather than poverty porn clickbait. Our work is to find ways to be connected to the land. It is to imagine what homelessness abolition means in 10, 20, 100 years. Our work is to help people break the vicious cycle of homelessness, to see the numbers on the streets go down, to develop leaders that believe homelessness can be abolished. We know we are needed because our task is to build a working class revolution led by people experiencing homelessness. This is not the task of organisations & charities. This is the task of the people.

Our work is to be focused, organised and committed to each other and the homelessness abolitionist struggle we are part of. It is to bring more of us, more of the people, into this work. Our work is taking collective responsibility for an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, working-class people's revolution that is so desperately needed. Because dear lord, people are dying poor whilst the rich rub their bellies. Our work is to love the people so deeply that we transform together. Our work is to imagine a political home, where leaders meet, live, eat, organise, love and laugh together.

As people who've experienced homelessness we know we have a definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.